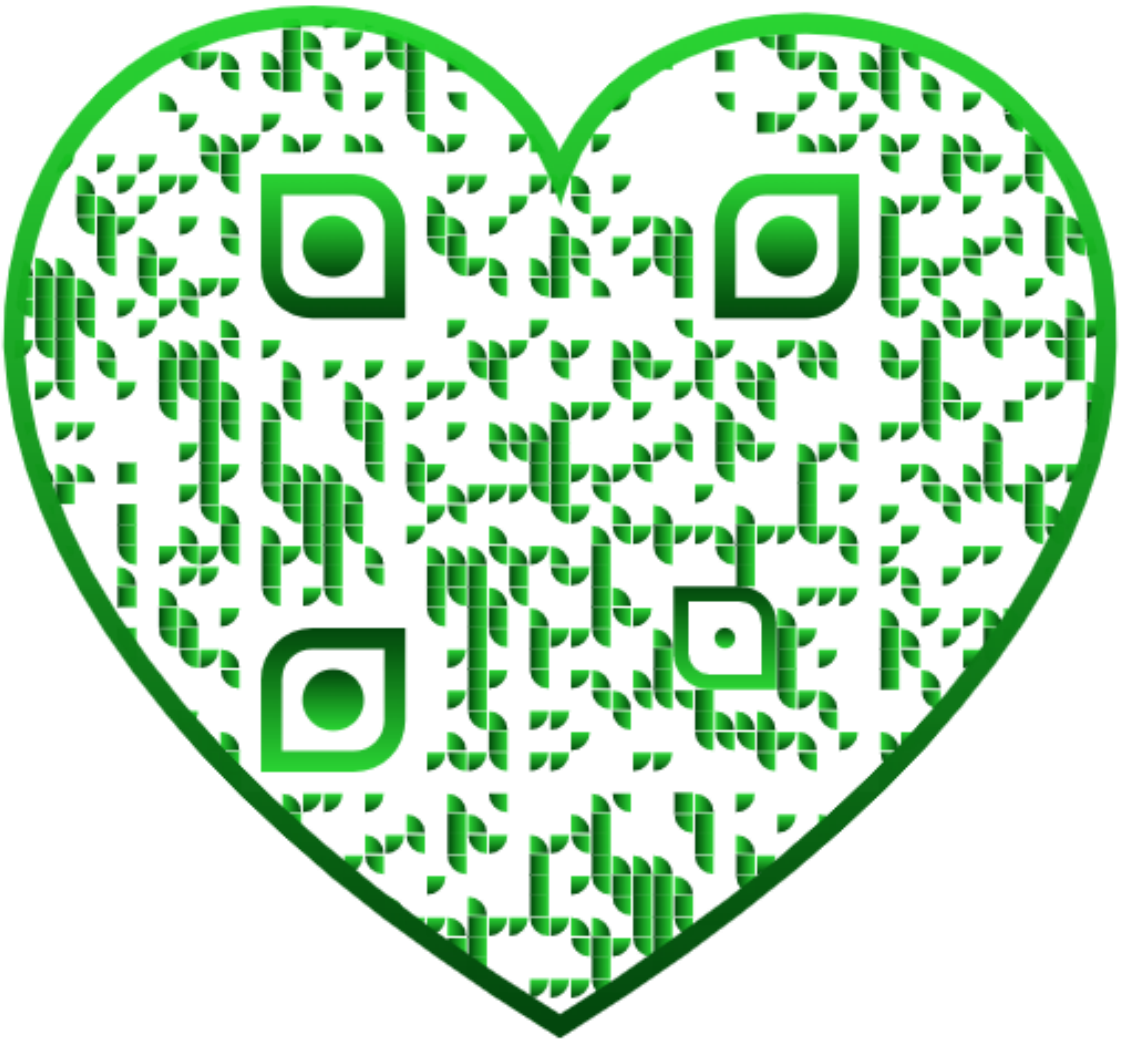
Hindu Gods & Goddesses

Understanding Hindu Divinities

STEPHEN KNAPP

JAICO



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Introduction

The reason why I decided to write this book was because of a series of incidents that happened to convince me of the need for such a book. First, I was approached more than once by people who wanted a book that explained all about the Divinities of Vedic culture. They asked if I knew of a good book that would answer all of their questions. Well, of course, I knew of some, but they were the books I had gotten while in India. Or there were a few others that were large photographic books, and a little out of the budget of most people. So, such books were not so readily available.

Then I gave a lecture and presentation to an interfaith group about how the Divine appears through Vedic art and in the deities in the temples, and explained the various personalities in the Vedic pantheon. These were people of all faiths, and many came up to me afterwards to expressed how much they liked the presentation, how they felt drawn to the various Vedic Divinities, and if I had anything more on that topic. Obviously, a book such as this one would have been most appropriate to further their knowledge about the topic I had spoken. So, what to do? Obviously, a book should be written in a manner to make the information easily understood, and published in a way and priced so that it can be easily available. That is how I decided to present a book that focused on this topic.

Plus, it was to show that there are reasons for the various Divinities, and that it is not so complicated to understand when it is put into proper perspective. This is a complaint that is sometimes heard from those who are not familiar with Vedic culture: Why are there so many gods? They do not understand that actually there is only one God. And by understanding the Vedic Divinities appropriately, that becomes clear. This book will do that.

CHAPTER ONE

Why So Many Gods?

The four primary *Vedas,* namely the *Rig, Sama, Atharva* and *Yajur Vedas,* represent the accomplishment of a highly developed religious system. The primary function and goal of these four *Vedas* was to encourage satisfaction of material desires through worship of the demigods, or those Divinities called the Vedic gods. Therefore, the *Vedas* contain many directions for properly performing the necessary worship and particular sacrifices or rituals in worship to these *devas* (demigods) to get the blessings that would help increase one's power and position, or for reaching the heavens in one's future, or other goals.

The point is that the *devas* affect or assist in all levels of universal management and activities, including the weather, or who is bestowed with particular opulences such as riches, beautiful wife or husband, large family, good health, *etc.* For example, one could worship Agni for getting power, Durgadevi for good fortune, Indra for good sex life or plenty of rain, or the Vasus for getting money. Such instruction is in the *karma-kanda* section of the *Vedas* which many people considered to be the most important part of Vedic knowledge. But this is for helping people acquire the facilities for living a basic material existence. There are, of course, various actions, or karmas, prompted by our desires to achieve certain results. This is the *karma-kanda* section of the *Vedas.* However, this is not the complete understanding of the *karma-kanda* segment, which is meant to supply the rituals for purifying our mind and actions while in the pursuit of our desires, and not to limit ourselves merely to live with the intent of acquiring all of one's material wants and necessities from the demigods. By having faith and steadiness in the performance of the ritual, one establishes purification in one's habits and thoughts. This provides a gradual process of acquiring one's needs and working out one's desires while simultaneously becoming purified and free

of them. Such purification of our consciousness can then bring one to a higher level of spiritual activity. This was the higher purpose of the *karma-kanda* rituals. Without this understanding, one misses the point and remains attached to rituals in the pursuit of material desires, which will drag one further into material existence.

Therefore, as different Vedic literature was compiled and presented, the goal of such texts changed from focusing on rituals and prayers and became more directed toward understanding one's spiritual identity and relationship with the Supreme. These included such texts as the *Upanishads,* and then on to the *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavad-gita,* and further to include the *Puranas* and other texts, to name a few. Thus, such Vedic *shastra* or spiritual books elaborated on the spiritual truths in the *Vedas* and also emphasized different Gods, such as Vishnu or Krishna, who were the Divinities who could bring one to a higher spiritual consciousness and help one attain *moksha* or complete liberation from material existence. The other demigods cannot provide for such liberation. Thus, the whole library of Vedic texts includes information on all levels of spiritual understanding, the heights of which direct a person to become free from the desires for material facilities, or the need to worship the demigods for such blessings, and for attaining entrance into the spiritual domain, which is the highest of all spiritual goals.

TWO WAYS TO VIEW THE VEDIC DIVINITIES

There are generally two ways that followers of the Vedic tradition view the Vedic Divinities. For some, who are swayed toward the impersonalist view, they feel that the Supreme is not a being but an impersonal force from which everything is created, like the great Brahman effulgence. They usually feel that all of the Vedic Divinities are but different forms or representations of the same Supreme or Absolute Truth. Thus, it does not matter whether a person worships Shiva, Krishna, Ganesh, Murugan, or any other of the Vedic gods or goddesses, because they all represent the same Absolute Truth or God in various forms. This is true with the *avatars* of Lord Krishna, but there are differences with the other *devas,* which will become clear as we go through this book.

On the other hand, there are those who feel that the Absolute Truth is, indeed, ultimately a personality. They hold the view that it does make a difference in which of the Vedic Divinities you worship, because they offer varying blessings and results from such worship. So, each one has a specific purpose.

This is the reason why some people ask why there seem to be so many gods within Hinduism or Vedic culture, and, such being the case, which one is best to worship? Yet, if we properly analyze the situation, we will understand that all of the Vedic Divinities have different purposes, and there is, indeed, but one Supreme Being who has many agents or demigods who assist in managing the various aspects of the cosmic creation and the natural forces within. And, like anyone else, if they are properly approached with prayer or worship, they may help facilitate the person by granting certain wishes that may be within the jurisdiction of that demigod. So, let us begin to explain.

First of all, in some places in the early portions of Vedic literature it is described that there are 33 Vedic gods, or even as many as thirty-three million. The 33 gods are calculated as being the eight Vasus, eleven Rudras (forms of Shiva), twelve Adityas, along with Indra and Prajapati (Brahma). Then there are also other positions that are considered major or minor *devas.* According to the *Vedas,* the *devas* are not imaginary or mythological beings, but are agents of the Supreme Will to administer different aspects of the universal affairs. They also represent and control various powers of nature. Thus, they manifest in the physical, subtle or psychic levels of our existence both from within and without. In this way, a transcendentalist sees that behind every aspect of nature is a personality.

The names of these gods are considered offices or positions, rather than the actual name of the demigod. For example, we may call the president of the country by his personal name, or simply Mr. President. It's the position itself that allows for him to have certain powers or areas of influence. In the case of the *devas,* it is only after accumulating much pious credit that a living being can earn the position of being a particular demigod. Then a person may become an Indra, or Vayu, or Brahma, or attain some other position to assume specific powers, or to control various aspects of material energy. Thus, such beings are not a God, but are demigods, they merely have a position within this material creation, as

long as it remains in place, though some people may call them the Vedic gods for ease of conversation.

Another example is that when you walk into a big factory, you see so many workers and all that they are doing. You may initially think that these workers are the reason for whatever goes on in the factory. However, more important than the workers are the foremen, the managers, and then the executives who oversee and direct the activities and flow of work. Amongst these you will find people of varying degrees of authority. Someone will be in charge of designing the products. Another may be the Chief Financial Officer or main accountant. Another may be in charge of personnel, while someone else may be in charge of maintenance in the factory itself. Finally, a chief executive officer or president of the company is the most important of all. Without him there may not even be a company. You may not see the president right away, but his influence is everywhere since all the workers are engaging in projects according to his decisions. The managers and foremen act as his authorized agents to keep things moving accordingly. The numerous demigods act in the same way concerning the functions of nature, all of whom represent some aspect or power of the Supreme Will. That's why it is sometimes said there are 33 million different gods in Hinduism. It has also been referred that every living entity holds a form of God within them, as Supersoul. Right now there are over eight billion human beings that populate this planet, which means that just within the human species there are over eight billion gods that circulate through this world, if you look at it that way. Actually, there may be many forms, *avataras,* or aspects of God, but there is only one ultimate God, or one Absolute Truth. God means one, the predominate source from which everything else is created.

Another view of the Vedic *devas* or demigods is that they represent different aspects of understanding ourselves, especially through the path of yoga and meditation. For example, the god of wind is Vayu, and is related to the practice of yoga as the breath and its control in *pranayama*. Agni is the god of fire and relates to the fire of consciousness or awareness. Soma relates to the bliss in the *samadhi* of yoga practice. Many of the Vedic gods also represent particular powers of yoga and are related to the different *chakras* in the subtle body. It is accepted that as a person raises his or her consciousness through the *chakras,* he

or she will attain the level of awareness and the power and assistance that is associated with the particular divine personality related to that *chakra.*

The reciprocation between the demigods and society is explained in *Bhagavad-gita* (3.10-12). It is stated that in the beginning the Lord of all beings created men and demigods along with the sacrifices to Lord Vishnu that were to be performed. The Lord blessed them saying that these sacrifices will enable men to prosper and attain all desirable things. By these sacrificial duties the demigods will be pleased and the demigods will also please you with all the necessities of life, and prosperity will spread to all. But, as explained, he who enjoys what is given by the demigods without offering them in return is a thief.

In this way, it was recommended that people could perform sacrificial rituals to obtain their desires. However, by the performance of such acts they should understand their dependent position, not only on the demigods, but ultimately on the Supreme Being.

As further explained in *Bhagavad-gita* (3.14-15), all living beings exist on food grains, which are produced from rain, which is produced by the performance of prescribed sacrifices or duties. These prescribed duties are described in the Vedic literature, which is manifest from the Supreme Being. Therefore, the Supreme is eternally established in acts of sacrifice.

Although the demigods may accept worship from the human beings and bless them with particular benedictions according to the sacrifices that are performed, they are still not on the level of the Supreme Lord Vishnu (who is an expansion of Lord Krishna). The *Rigveda* (1.22.20) explains: "The demigods are always looking to that supreme abode of Vishnu." *Bhagavad-gita* (17.23) also points out: "From the beginning of creation, the three syllables *om tat sat* have been used to indicate the Supreme Absolute Truth (Brahman). They were uttered by brahmanas while chanting the Vedic hymns and during sacrifices, for the satisfaction of the Supreme." In this way, by uttering *om tat sat,* which is stressed in Vedic texts, the performers of the rituals for worshiping the demigods were also offering obeisances to Lord Vishnu for its success. The four *Vedas* mainly deal with material elevation and since Lord Vishnu is the Lord of material liberation, most sacrifices were directed toward the demigods.

In *Bhagavad-gita,* however, Lord Krishna points out that men of small knowledge, who are attracted by worldly desires, take delight in the flowery words of the *Vedas* that prescribe rituals for attaining power, riches, or rebirth in heaven. With their goal of enjoyment they say there is nothing else than this. However, Krishna goes on to explain (in *Bhagavad-gita* 7.21-23) that when a person desires to worship a particular demigod for the temporary and limited fruits he or she may bestow, Krishna, as the Supersoul in everyone's heart, makes that person's faith in that demigod steady. But all the benefits given by any demigod actually are given by Krishna alone, for without whom no one has any power. Furthermore, Krishna explains that the worshipers of the demigods go to the planets of the demigods, but worshipers of Krishna reach Krishna's spiritual abode.

Thus, as one progresses in understanding, it is expected that they will gradually give up the pursuit for temporary material pleasures and then begin to endeavor for reaching the supreme goal of Vedic knowledge. For one who is situated in such knowledge and is self-realized, the prescribed duties in the *Vedas* for worshiping the demigods are unnecessary. As *Bhagavad-gita* (3.17-18) explains, for one who is fully self-realized, who is fully satiated in the self, delights only in the self, there is no duty or need to perform the prescribed duties found in the *Vedas,* because he has no purpose or material desires to fulfill.

CHAPTER SIX

The Identity of Lord Shiva and Goddess Durga

After understanding the information supplied so far, we can begin to see how the different Vedic gods have particular roles or functions, and represent or control different forces of nature. Thus, they are not all the same. They all have different potencies to do particular things in the arrangement and management of the universal creation. In this way, most of them have specific positions and purposes to help facilitate the cause for the creation, maintenance, and even the destruction of the universe.

The most prominent of all the Vedic gods consists of the Trinity of Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva. Brahma assists in creating the world, Vishnu maintains it, and Shiva helps in its annihilation. (I have dealt with this aspect much more extensively in my book, *How the Universe Was Created,* so I will not include that here.) Those that follow the Vedic path can generally be divided into three main categories; namely those who worship Shiva and are Shaivites, those who worship Shakti or the Goddess and are Shaktas, and those who worship Vishnu, the Vaishnavas. So, let us understand the identity and function of Lord Shiva and Goddess Durga.

*

One of the most significant of all the Vedic gods is Shiva. And one of the most noted of all the goddesses is Shiva's wife, Durga. They also go by many other names. For example, Durga is also called Parvati and Sati, which means chastity. The name Shiva means auspicious. Shiva is also known by many different names according to his function. When, for example, he expresses himself through space and time, he is known as Ishwara. He is called Sadashiva when he

functions through air, which incorporates the principles of both sound and touch. Shiva is known as Rudra when he operates through fire, which incorporates the principles of sound, touch and form.

Shiva is the embodiment and controller of *tama-guna,* the mode of darkness, inertia, and the tendency towards annihilation. This is how he assists in the destruction of the cosmic creation in the end times, as well as in the exhibition of continuous forms of death and destruction that we see every day. However, this demise and dissolution can also be viewed as a renewal, which is also considered to be a part of Shiva.

We can find additional characteristics of Lord Shiva in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (4.2.2) in which it states that Lord Shiva is the spiritual master of the entire world. He is a peaceful personality, free from enmity, always satisfied in himself. He is the greatest among all the demigods. He is the spiritual master of the world by showing how to worship the Supreme. He is considered the best of all devotees. Therefore, he has his own spiritual line or *sampradaya* called the Rudra-sampradaya that comes directly from him. These days it is found in the Vishnusvami-sampradaya, or the Vallabha-sampradaya.

Shiva is described as the most powerful, second only to Lord Vishnu.[1] In this way, he is not the Supreme, but is almost as powerful. Although he has nothing to attain in this material world, he is always engaged for the benefit of everyone in this universe, and is accompanied by his material and dangerous energies like goddess Kali and goddess Durga. They serve him by killing all kinds of demons and impious persons. War represents Kali's energy of devastation. Sometimes we see pictures of a fierce form of Kali standing with one foot on the body of Shiva. This is because Shiva sometimes has to lie down in front of her to pacify her from killing all the demoniac people in the world. In this way, Shiva controls the material energy. Lord Shiva is also in control of the destructive energy, *tamo-guna,* the mode of darkness, and is assisted by Kali and Durga in this purpose. Durga helps him in keeping the majority of the living beings in the darkness of ignorance. That is why Durga and Kali are described as dangerous potencies. Only those who are serious about spiritual life are protected from this darkness.

Shiva is often shown as a handsome young man, with long hair from which flows a spurt of the Ganga (Ganges) River (an emblem of purity) and in which is

also a crescent moon. He is also white or light bluish in complexion, sometimes with a third eye between the eyebrows on the forehead, and usually with four arms (a sign of universal power) holding a Trishula (a trident, showing his ruling proficiency over the three modes of nature), the Damaru (small hour-glass shaped drum, the beating of which represents language or the alphabet), and exhibiting the *mudras* (hand positions) of Abhaya (protection) and Varada (giving blessings).

Lord Shiva on the left, with Goddess Parvati or Durga on the right, with little Lord Ganesh on their lap. Deities located in central Delhi.

It is also said that Shiva's drum represents *srishti,* the creation; the *abhaya* hand (giving blessings) represents *sthiti,* or preservation; his foot that presses down symbolizes *tirobhava,* or the veiling effect; and the uplifted foot means blessings *(anugraha),* especially toward seeing through the veil of illusion caused by ego. When he is shown with an axe, it represents *samhara,* destruction.

Sometimes he is shown with eight, ten or even thirty-two hands. These represent his various potencies and contain such things as an Akshamala (rosary that signifies being the master of spiritual sciences), the Khatvanga (magic wand which shows his being an adept in occult sciences), a Darpana (a mirror showing that the creation is a reflection of his cosmic form), a *chakra* (disc), a noose, a staff, a bow, a Pashupata spear, a lotus, sword, and so on. He is often sitting on or wearing a tiger skin. The tiger skin represents his command over his desires, which often consumes common men like a tiger.

Shiva is often shown with serpents entwined around his arms, waist, neck, and hair. Snakes often invoke fear. So, this represents how Shiva is free from fear. The snake also signifies time. If a poisonous snake bites someone, it is only a matter of time before that person will die. And time catches up with everyone sooner or later. So, Lord Shiva is the Lord over time and death. These serpents also indicate that he is surrounded by death but beyond the power of it.

Shiva is also seen with ash from the cremation grounds smeared over his body. This is called *vibhuti.* It symbolizes death or detachment from the world and lust. It also indicates that our bodies, being inert matter in their essential form, will also become ashes when we die and if the body is cremated. Thus, we must rise above the bodily identification and become conscious of our real identity within. Ash is the sign of Shiva's complete renunciation of the world.

Sometimes Shiva is shown wearing a garland of skulls. The skulls are representative of his being the lord of destruction and the cyclical nature of the appearance and disappearance of the material creation.

One of the most beautiful forms of Lord Shiva is portrayed in his dancing position, known as Nataraja, the king of dancers. As Nataraja, Shiva holds his damaru drum in his upper right hand. This indicates *nada*, the sound of the universal development. In his other hand, he holds a flame of destruction.

Together these indicate both creation and destruction, the counterpoints of all material existence. His right hand is also held in the position of blessing and protection. As Nataraja, he also wears the skin of a tiger, which he slew. This represents the ego, which will fight when attacked and must be killed by the knowledge of the guru, or the wisdom of Nataraja himself. As Nataraja, he is shown with one foot subduing or standing on the body of Mahamaya, the personification of the illusion which is the cause of all suffering. The other foot is raised upward, which represents the attainment of the *turiya* state beyond the states of waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and the influence of the mind and creation. Thus, he is completely free from all of these.

There are many stories that relate how and why Shiva appears the way he does. For example, Lord Shiva is shown at times with a third eye in between his eyebrows on his forehead. It is said that his third eye represents the eye of wisdom, or inner sight. The other two eyes represent the balanced form of love and justice. Thus, Lord Shiva is not too harsh nor too lenient, but views everything with the proper proportions of love, justice and inner knowledge. Together, Shiva's three eyes also represent the sun, moon and fire, the means by which the universe is illuminated. How Shiva got a third eye is explained that one day Shiva's wife Parvati covered Shiva's eyes with her hands and the whole world was enveloped in darkness. Then Shiva willed the third eye to manifest, which sent forth light, heat and fire.

Another story is that once when the heavenly Ganga River was descending onto the Earth, the weight of its force would have crushed the world, so Shiva accepted it on his head, wherein it stayed until it was ready to be released. The Ganga River is considered to have entered the universe when the Supreme Lord in His *avatar* as Vamanadeva kicked the outer shell of the universe with His toe, thus letting in some of the water of the Karanadakashayi Ocean, the spiritual water that surrounds the universe. This became the holy Ganga. Thus, it is considered the foot wash of the Lord. So, Lord Shiva keeps this water on his head.

Shiva's Ganga water is also said to represent the flow of knowledge and devotion to God. Shiva is known as the foremost devotee of Lord Krishna, Vishnu, or Lord Rama, which is one of the meanings of the spout of Ganga water

on Shiva's head.

The *Bhagavatam* (10.41.15) relates: "The water of the river Ganga [Ganges] has purified the three worlds, having become transcendental by bathing Your [Lord Vishnu's] feet. Lord Shiva accepted that water on his head, and by that water's grace the sons of King Sagara attained heaven."

Another story is that during the time when the demons and demigods were churning the ocean of milk, many objects started to be produced from it. One was the moon, which Shiva took and placed in his hair. This represents the phases of the moon or the passing of time, which is but an ornament for Shiva since he is not affected by it. The crescent moon also signifies the happiness of life, especially when it is based on a spiritual purpose. The rays of the moon enhance one's inspiration and energy for spiritual life, just as it is said that the rays of the moon nourish the vegetable kingdom. It represents the cooling light of the knowledge of the Self, and the way life should be when lived in that knowledge.

Another object that appeared from the churning was the severe poison that Shiva drank to keep it from spreading. However, Parvati, being alarmed at this, grabbed his throat so it could not go down, which is where he kept the poison, and which made his throat turn blue.

Shiva is often portrayed standing next to or on his bull, Nandikeshvara or Nandi (meaning joyful). Symbolically, Nandi represents the animal tendencies, such as the urge for sex, which are tamed and docile by Lord Shiva's mastery over it. Thus, he rides on Nandi, who is obedient to Shiva's command. Nandi also represents strength and virility. He is often seen in temples of Shiva in a reclining position in front of the main shrine, gazing toward the image of Shiva. Nandi also represents the *jivatma,* the individual soul, and the animalistic impulses that will carry it away into material existence, unless such tendencies are curbed.

KRISHNA DEVOTEES ARE DEAR TO SHIVA AND SHIVA IS DEAR TO THEM

Shiva works for the benefit of everyone, and tries to help the living beings

make spiritual advancement. This is why he has his own line of disciplic succession. This is also why he says to the sons of King Pracinibarhi, "Any person who is surrendered to the Supreme Personality of God, Lord Krishna, the controller of everything, is very dear to me."[1]

The sons of the King were going to practice austerities to worship Lord Vishnu and while searching for a suitable place happened to find Lord Shiva. His bodily luster was like molten gold, his throat was bluish, he had three eyes, and was accompanied by musicians who were glorifying him. Shiva is the protector of the pious and those of gentle behavior. So, he was pleased to speak to the princes the way he did. He continued in this way:

"A person who is directly surrendered to Lord Krishna, or Vishnu, in unalloyed devotional service is immediately promoted to the spiritual planets. I, Lord Shiva, and other demigods attain these planets only after the destruction of the material world. You are all devotees of the Lord, and as such I appreciate that you are as respectable as the Supreme Personality of Godhead Himself. I know in this way that the devotees also respect me and that I am dear to them. Thus no one can be as dear to the devotees as I am."[2]

In this way, a devotee of Krishna does not disrespect Lord Shiva, but worships him as the greatest of devotees of Lord Krishna. A Krishna *bhakta* (devotee) also prays to Lord Shiva, but asks Shiva to assist him in attaining the favor of Lord Krishna, and not merely for material benefits. As we find in the Tulasi *Ramayana* (Uttara-Kanda, Doha 45), Lord Rama says "With joined palms I lay before you another secret doctrine: without adoring Sankara (Lord Shiva) man cannot attain devotion to Me." So, in this way, Shiva can assist us in attaining devotion to Lord Krishna and His expansions.

After Lord Shiva had spoken to the sons of King Pracinabarhi, he relates a particular mantra for their benefit, which is pure and auspicious for anyone who wants to attain the ultimate goal of life. This mantra is called Shiva's Song, and consists of verses 33 to 79 of the Twenty-fourth Chapter of the Forth Canto in *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. He starts his prayer with this verse:

"O Supreme Personality of Godhead, all glories unto You. You are the most exalted of all self-realized souls. Since You are always auspicious for the self-

realized, I wish that You be auspicious to me. You are worshipable by virtue of the all perfect instructions You give. You are the Supersoul; therefore I offer my obeisances unto You as the supreme living bring."

Through the remaining 45 verses of this prayer, Lord Shiva praises the many qualities, characteristics, and powers of the Supreme Being in the form of Lord Krishna. At the end of many years in which the sons of the King, called the Pracetas, repeated this prayer everyday, Lord Vishnu Himself appeared to them. He said, "Those who will offer Me the prayers composed by Lord Shiva, both in the morning and in the evening, will be given benedictions by Me. In this way, they can both fulfill their desires and attain good intelligence."[3]

Also in the *Bhagavatam* (4.6.42-53) we can see Lord Shiva's greatness among the demigods. During the disastrous ritual of Daksha, who displayed great dislike toward Shiva and Shiva's wife, Durga (Sati) immolated herself in fire. Sati was Daksha's own daughter and could not tolerate the insults her father made toward her husband, Shiva. So, while in meditation she burst into flames. Thereafter, Lord Brahma and the demigods went to pacify Lord Shiva. Brahma consoled Shiva and addressed him as "My dear Lord," and called him the controller of the entire universe, the combination of mother and father of the universe, and the Supreme Brahman, beyond this creation. Therein we can see that Brahma, the partial creator of the universe, offers praises to Lord Shiva as a superior. This is to appease Lord Shiva, since it is known that his anger can annihilate the universe.

When the ritual was able to continue and Daksha offered the clarified butter with the mantras from the *Yajur Veda,* Lord Vishnu appeared there in His original form as Narayana. As described in the *Bhagavatam* (4.7.18-29), as soon as Lord Vishnu appeared, all the demigods, including Lord Brahma, Shiva, the Gandharvas and sages, immediately offered their respectful obeisances. In the presence of Lord Vishnu's glaring effulgence from His body, everyone else's luster faded. They all offered their prayers to Him. Therein, Lord Shiva addresses Lord Vishnu, "My dear Lord, my mind and consciousness are always fixed on Your lotus feet, which, as the source of all benediction and the fulfillment of all desires, are worshiped by all liberated sages because Your lotus feet are worthy of worship. With my mind fixed on Your lotus feet, I am no longer disturbed by

persons who blaspheme me, claiming that my activities are not purified. I do not mind their accusations, and I excuse them out of compassion, just as You exhibit compassion toward all living entities."

After all the personalities had offered their prayers to Lord Vishnu, He replied to Daksha, "Brahma, Shiva and I are the supreme cause of the material manifestation. I am the Supersoul, the self-effulgent witness. But impersonally there is no difference between Brahma, Lord Shiva and Me. I am the original Personality of Godhead, but in order to create, maintain and annihilate this cosmic manifestation, I act through My material energy, and according to different grades of activity, My representations are equally named. One who is not in proper knowledge thinks that the demigods like Brahma and Shiva are independent, or he even thinks that the living entities are independent. A person with average intelligence does not think the head and other parts of the body to be separate. Similarly, My devotee does not differentiate Vishnu, the all-pervading Personality, from anything or any living entity. One who does not consider Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva or the living entities in general to be separate from the Supreme, and who knows Brahman, actually realizes peace; others do not."[4]

What this indicates is the interdependence of the demigods on Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu is the ultimate cause of the universal creation. Lord Brahma was born out of Lord Vishnu, and Lord Shiva was born from Lord Brahma, as will be explained. It is the energy that comes from Lord Vishnu, in the form of Lord Brahma and Shiva, that creates and annihilates the universe. Lord Brahma is manifested for the continuation of the creation, while Lord Shiva assists in the annihilation. In this way, they are interconnected and work together like parts of a single body. Yet, they all play distinct and significant roles in the affairs of the cosmos, but are dependent on Lord Vishnu. When we see that all living beings are expansions from the Supreme Lord and His energy, then one can achieve real peace.

In fact, it is said that these sages and devotees who see with such equal vision become worshipable by Lord Shiva, Brahma and Lord Vishnu. Once when Lord Shiva was traveling, he met the great sage Markandeya as he was coming out of his yogic trance. At that time, Markandeya offered prayers to Lord Shiva who

blessed the sage and then asked if there were any benedictions that the sage wanted. As described in the *Bhagavatam* (12.10.19-22) Suta Gosvami said: "Lord Shiva, the foremost demigod and the shelter of the saintly devotees, was satisfied by Markandeya' s praise. Pleased, he smiled and addressed the sage. Lord Shiva said: Please ask me for some benediction, since among all givers of benedictions, we three--Brahma, Vishnu and I--are the best. Seeing us never goes in vain, because simply by seeing us a mortal achieves immortality. The inhabitants and ruling demigods of all planets, along with Lord Brahma, the Supreme Lord Hari and I, glorify, worship and assist those brahmanas who are saintly, always peaceful, free of material attachment, compassionate to all living beings, purely devoted to us, devoid of hatred and endowed with equal vision. These devotees do not differentiate between Lord Vishnu, Lord Brahma and me, nor do they differentiate between themselves and other living beings. Therefore, because you are this kind of saintly devotee, we worship you."

LORD SHIVA'S POSITION

In the *Bhagavatam* (4.3.23), Lord Shiva himself tells his wife, Sati, that he is always engaged in worshiping the Supreme Personality known as Lord Vasudeva, Krishna, who is revealed in pure consciousness, by offering obeisances.

Herein, we can see that in actuality Lord Shiva is subordinate to Lord Vishnu, Krishna, in that he is also a part of Lord Krishna's universal form, as described in the *Bhagavad-gita* (11.15). Therein we find: "Arjuna said: My dear Lord Krishna, I see assembled together in Your [universal] body all the demigods and various other living entities. I see Brahma sitting on the lotus flower as well as Lord Shiva and many sages and divine serpents."

In the pastimes of Lord Krishna in Vrindavana, we find that Lord Shiva had also tried to enter the *rasa-lila* dance between Krishna and the *gopis,* the cowherd damsels. The Mahadeva Gopisvara temple in Vrindavana is said to mark where Lord Shiva desired to become a *gopi* in order to enter the dance with Lord Krishna. So, Lord Shiva was trying to enter into the most confidential pastimes and devotion of Sri Krishna.

In another light, Lord Shiva is Lord Krishna's brother-in-law. At the time of Krishna's birth pastime in Vrindavana, Yasoda bore a daughter, Katyayani or Durga, and Mother Devaki bore a son, Lord Krishna. To save Him from the nefarious King Kamsa, Krishna's father, Vasudeva, brought Krishna from Mathura to Gokul and exchanged Him with the daughter of Mother Yasoda, taking the daughter back with him. When King Kamsa came to get the newborn from Mother Devaki, the child rose into the air and exhibited her form as the eight-armed Durga and chastised Kamsa. Durga is Lord Shiva's wife, and in this pastime Lord Krishna's sister, so it can also be said that Shiva is the brother-in-law of Lord Krishna.

In another place in the *Bhagavatam* (8.12.10), when Lord Shiva was bewildered by the Supreme Lord's form as a beautiful woman, Mohini-Murti, Lord Shiva admits his weakness in being unable to fully understand the illusory nature of this material creation. "O My Lord, I, who am considered to be the best of the demigods, and Lord Brahma and the great rishis, headed by Marichi, are born of the mode of goodness. Nonetheless, we are bewildered by Your illusory energy and cannot understand what this creation is. Aside from us, what is to be said of others, like the demons and human beings, who are in the base modes of material nature *[rajo-guna* and *tamo-guna*]? How will they know You?"

Later, Lord Shiva, who is often pictured in meditation, explains to his wife who it is that he meditates on while in trance. He says, "O Goddess, You have now seen the illusory energy of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is the unborn master of everyone. Although I am one of the principal expansions of His Lordship, even I was illusioned by His energy. What then is to be said of others, who are fully dependent on maya? When I finished performing mystic yoga for one thousand years, you asked me upon whom was I meditating. Now, here is the Supreme Person to whom time has no entrance and who the *Vedas* cannot understand."[5]

Another time when Lord Shiva described his subservient position was when Lord Krishna was battling with Banasura, who was a devotee of Lord Shiva, and was cutting off Banasura's hundreds of arms that he had acquired as a blessing from Lord Shiva. When it looked like Banasura was about to lose his life, Lord Shiva, who had also been a part of the battle scene, approached Lord Krishna to

pacify Him and spare Banasura's life. Therein *(Bhagavatam* 10.63.34-45) it is related, "Sri Rudra said: You alone are the Absolute Truth, the supreme light, the mystery hidden within the verbal manifestation of the Absolute. Those whose hearts are spotless can see You, for You are uncontaminated, like the sky." In the ten verses that follow, Lord Shiva also addresses Lord Krishna in other ways: "Your current descent into the material realm, O Lord of unrestricted power, is meant for upholding the principles of justice and benefitting the entire universe. We demigods, each depending on Your grace and authority, develop the seven planetary systems. You are the original person, one without a second, transcendental and self-manifesting. Uncaused, you are the cause of all, and You are the ultimate controller."

When Uddhava was praying to Lord Krishna, he said, "Even Lord Brahma and Lord Shiva act only as Your instruments in cosmic creation and annihilation, which are ultimately done by You, the Supreme Lord, in Your invisible aspect of time."[6]

One of the major differences between Shiva and Krishna is described as follows: "Sri Shukadeva Gosvami said: Lord Shiva is always united with his personal energy, the material nature. Manifesting himself in three features in response to the entreaties of nature's three modes, he thus embodies the threefold principle of material ego in goodness, passion and ignorance. The sixteen elements have evolved as transformations of that false ego. When a devotee of Lord Shiva worships his manifestation in any one of these elements, the devotee obtains all sorts of corresponding enjoyable opulences. Lord Hari, however, has no connection with the material modes. He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the all-seeing eternal witness, who is transcendental to material nature. One who worships Him becomes similarly free from the material modes."[7] Thus, a worshiper of Lord Shiva gets the results that are conditional to the affects of material nature, while a worshiper of Lord Krishna gets released from the material nature rather than receiving material opulences.

So, in this regard, Sri Shukadeva Gosvami said, "Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva and others are able to curse or bless one. Lord Shiva and Lord Brahma are very quick to curse or bestow benedictions, my dear King, but the infallible Supreme Lord is not."[8]

Another aspect of understanding Shiva's position has to do with his purpose, which is connected with how he appeared. This is clearly explained in the ancient text of the *Brahma-samhita* (verse 15). Therein we find it said "The same Maha-Vishnu created [His next expansion of] Vishnu [Garbhodakashayi Vishnu] from His left limb, Brahma, the first progenitor of beings, from His right limb and, from the space between His two eyebrows, Shambhu [Shiva], the divine masculine manifested halo."

In an explanation of this, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta elaborates that when the mundane creation of the universe is manifested, then the principle of Shambhu in the form of Rudra is born from the space between the two eyebrows of Vishnu. Shambhu enshrines the principle of materialistic ego. This principle makes the living being identify with the material body, subject to the desires for material and bodily happiness. *(Brahma-samhita,* verse 1 6, purport)

So, the power of Lord Shiva comes from the potency of Lord Vishnu. This is described as follows in verse 10 of the *Brahma-samhita:* "The person embodying the material causal principle, viz., the great lord of this mundane world [Maheshvara] Shambhu, in the form of the male generating organ, is joined to his female consort, the limited energy [Maya] as the efficient causal principle. The Lord of the world Maha-Vishnu is manifest in him by His subjective portion in the form of His glance."

In this way, during the process of the material creation, and when Maha-Vishnu casts His glance onto the shadowy potency of Maya, Shambhu, lord of the *pradhana* (the unmanifest material ingredients), who is the same as Rudra, consummates his intercourse with Maya, the efficient principle of the cause of mundane energy. But Shambhu can do nothing independent of the energy of Maha-Vishnu, who represents the direct spiritual power of Krishna. In this way, the principle of the material creation is produced only when Maha-Vishnu, the plenary portion of Lord Krishna, is propitious towards the active endeavors of Maya, Shiva's consort, and the principle of mundane causality. *(Brahma-samhita,* verse 10, purport)

So, the difference between Maha-Vishnu and Shiva as Shambhu is more clearly described in the *Brahma-samhita* (verse 45) as follows: "Just as milk is transformed into curd by the action of acids, but yet the effect curd is neither the

same as, nor different from, its cause, viz., milk, so I adore the primeval Lord Govinda of whom the state of Shambhu is a transformation for the performance of the work of destruction."

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta adds clarification in the purport to this verse that Shiva is not a second Godhead other than Krishna. In fact, those who entertain such a discriminating sentiment commit a great offense to the Supreme Lord. The position of Shambhu is subservient to that of Govinda, Krishna. Hence, as the above verse indicates, they are not really different from each other. But as yogurt comes from its initial cause, so Shiva is manifest according to his initial cause, which is from Krishna through Maha-Vishnu. So, God takes a subservient position to His direct forms when He attains a distinct personality by the addition of a particular element of adulteration, which is the form of Lord Shiva or Shambhu, through which the Lord comes in contact with the material energy, since Maha-Vishnu never does touch the mundane energy. However, Shiva has no independent initiative or ability. This means that Shiva as Shambhu comes in contact with and interacts with the material energy as the agent of Maha-Vishnu, who does not come in such contact but only sets it all in motion.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta further describes that in this way, Govinda manifests Himself as a plenary portion which, in this case, is a *guna-avatara* in the form of Shambhu, lord of *tamo-guna* or the mode of darkness... Thus, Shambhu, in pursuance of the supreme will of Govinda, works in union with his consort, Durga-devi, by his own time energy.

Therefore, the real difference between Govinda and Shiva or Brahma is that all the majestic attributes of God are fully present in the form of Govinda, Krishna. Shiva and Brahma are entities adulterated with mundane qualities, however slight they may be. Though Vishnu is also a divine appearance in the mode of goodness, still He is not adulterated. The appearance of Narayana as Maha-Vishnu, or as Garbhodakashayi Vishnu (Vishnu's expansion in each universe) and Kshirodakashayi Vishnu (Vishnu's expansion as the Supersoul within each living being), are examples of the ubiquitous function of the Supreme Divinity. Lord Vishnu is Godhead Himself, and the two other *guna-avataras* (Brahma and Shiva) and all the other gods are entities possessing authority in subordination to Him. The different expansions of the Supreme Being, Govinda, are the same as

the identical light appearing in different candles, all shining by the spiritual potency of Govinda, Krishna. *(Brahma-samhita,* verse forty-six, purport)

This makes it clear that the forms and positions of Shiva and B rahma are eternal, but only in the context of the endurance of the material creation. Once the material creation is annihilated, their forms and positions are no longer needed. Lord Shiva is the lord of *tamo-guna* and material nature, but not of the spiritual world. It is only Lord Krishna who is described as the Supreme Being and controller of both the spiritual and material energies.

It is explained further by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta that Lord Krishna has sixty divine qualities in their fullest measure. While 50 of the divine qualities of the individual *jiva* souls are present along with five additional qualities in Lord Brahma. Yet in Shiva these fifty-five qualities are also present but in greater degrees than in Lord Brahma. *(Brahma-samhita,* verse 49, purport)

Thus, the position of Lord Shiva has been described relative to his purpose and function within the material creation, and his form is but an expansion of Lord Krishna. [More about Lord Shiva's real position and identity is explained later in the section of this chapter called "How Shiva and Durga Are Considered the Mother and Father of the Universe".]

HOW LORD SHIVA APPEARED IN THIS WORLD

The previous paragraphs point out how Lord Shiva participated in the creation process from Maha-Vishnu as Shambhu. But it is also related how Lord Shiva appeared in this universe in his personal form from Lord Brahma. It is explained in the *Bhagavatam* (3.12.4), that in the beginning of the creation process, Lord Brahma manifested four great sages named Sanaka, Sananda, Sanatana, and Sanatkumara. Brahma expected them to assist in filling the universe with varieties of living beings. However, they were unwilling to adopt materialistic activities because they were highly elevated beings. Brahma requested that they begin to produce progeny, but they refused because they were already attached to Lord Vasudeva, the Supreme Lord, and were focused on achieving liberation, *moksha.* So, they expressed their unwillingness, which made Lord Brahma extremely angry.

The anger that was generated in the mind of Lord Brahma, though he tried to control it, came out from between his eyebrows. Immediately there was produced a child of mixed red and blue color. This child immediately began to cry and requested to Lord Brahma, "O destiny maker, teacher of the universe, kindly designate my name and place." Lord Brahma then pacified the boy and said, "O chief of the demigods, you shall be called Rudra because you have cried so anxiously." Then Brahma gave Rudra the following places for his residence: the heart, the senses, the life-air of the body, the sky, the air, the fire, water, earth, sun, the moon, and austerity. He then told Rudra that he would be known by eleven other names: Manyu, Manu, Mahan, Shiva, Ritadhvaja, Ugrareta, Bhava, Kala, Vamadeva, and Dhritavrata. These names represent the other aspects of Lord Shiva, each having different appearances and activities. Rudra is often shown as tall, well built, with long hair, wielding the thunderbolt, bow and arrow. He is viewed as the protector of humanity against its enemies. He is also known as an excellent physician and has numerous medicines that can cure diseases. Brahma also told Rudra that he would have eleven wives, namely Dhi, Dhriti, Rasala, Uma, Niyut, Sarpi, Ila, Ambika, Iravati, Svadha, and Diksha.

Brahma then told Rudra to accept these names and wives, and that since he was one of the masters of the living beings, he should now increase the population on a large scale. Rudra then created many offspring that resembled him in color, strength and furious nature. They were unlimited in number, and when they gathered together, they attempted to devour the universe. Brahma, becoming alarmed at the situation, then requested Rudra not to generate living beings of this nature. It would be better if Rudra engaged himself in penance, or meditation, which is auspicious for all. Through penance he could create the universe as it was before. By penance only can one approach the Supreme Lord, who is within the heart of every living being and at the same time beyond the reach of the senses. Thus, Rudra accepted the advice of his father, Brahma, and went to the forest to perform austere penances. This is why we so often see Shiva pictured in the mountain forests engaged in meditation.

Some of Shiva's other names include Dakshinamurti, meaning a universal teacher. Then there is Trilochana (Three-eyed), Nila-kantha (Blue-throated), Pancha-anana (Five-faced), Chandrashekhara (Moon-crested), Gangadhara

(Bearer of the Ganga), Girisha (Mountain Lord), Jatadhara (Wearer of matted hair), Sthanu (Immutable), Visvanatha (Lord of the Universe), Bhairava (the Terrible, destructive aspect of Shiva), Bhutesha or Bhuteshvara (Lord of ghosts or elements), Hara (remover of death), Shambhu (abode of joy), Shankara (giver of joy), Bhava (existence), Mahadeva (great God), Ashani (thunderbolt), Isha or Ishana (the ruler), Pashupati (the herdsman or friend of animals), Mritunjaya (conqueror of death), Aghora (non-fearful), Ugra (the fearful), Bhima (the tremendous), Rudra (Lord of tears), as well as Shuli, Maheshvara, Ishvara, Sharva, Khandaparashu, Mrida, Krittivasas, Pinaki, Pramathadhipa, Kapardi, S hrikantha, S hitikantha, Kapalabhrit, Vamadeva, Mahadeva, Virupaksha, Krishanuretas, Sarvajna, Dhurjati, Nilalohita, Smarahara, Bharga, Tryambaka, Tripurantaka, Antakaripu, Kratudhvamsi, Vrishadhvaja, Vyomakesha, Umapati, Ahirbudhnya, Ashtamurti, Gajari, Mahanata, and others. The 1000 names of Shiva can be found in Chapter 17 of the Anushasana Parva of the *Mahabharata,* as well as in the *Linga Purana* (1.65-98).

SHAIVISM

Shaivism is one of the major traditions of the Vedic system, and centers around the worship of Lord Shiva. Those who accept Shiva as the supreme deity are called Shaivites. Its origin predates recorded history, but references to the worship of Shiva can be found in the *Vedas* and *Puranas.*

You will notice that a devotee of Shiva in India usually wears Vibhuti or *bhasma*, the sacred ash, on his forehead, and Radraksha *mala* around his neck and elsewhere. The Rudraksha or Rudra bead represents the third eye on Lord Shiva's forehead. The Shaivite should worship the Shiva *lingam* with the leaves of the Bilva trees, and his meditation should consist of chanting the Panchakshara, "Om Namaha Shivaya".

The philosophy of Shaivism covers a wide range of Hindu thought, from idealistic monism to pluralistic realism, depending on the locality. As it changed through the years, a number of Shaivite sects were established, and the Pasupatas are considered the earliest. The Shaiva cults have had great popularity with village people throughout India, and use a form of asceticism for their means of spiritual advancement. This includes rising above anger and greed, engaging in deep meditation, and concentrating on the repetition of the sacred syllable *om*. Many Shaiva ascetics can be recognized by their long matted hair, which may also be wrapped and piled up on the head in a bun. They often wear a horizontal, three-lined *tilok* mark on their forehead. Many initiates and *naga babas* also smear their bodies with ash that come from the sacred fire that they often have in their camp, or from crematoriums. They chant mantras to become free from the bondage of material existence, and sometimes dance and sing to induce trance-like states. Some of their practices have been rather unorthodox, depending on the school of thought, and, thus, some have met with opposition at various times. Much information about the practices of Shaivism is given in the *Shiva Purana.*

The Pasupatas were the earliest sect of Shaivism. They based their ideas on two works, both said to be by Kaundinya: the *Pasupatasutra* (written around 100-200 CE) and the *Pancarthabhasya* (400-600 CE). They expanded primarily into Gujarat. The Pasupatas accept the idea of a Supreme controller, but do not use

the *Vedas.* They establish the existence of the Supreme through inference and say that the Supreme, who they accept as Lord Shiva, is not the original cause of the material world, but is the operative cause in that he simply used the material ingredients which already existed to form the cosmic manifestation. Therefore, through a combination of the potency of Lord Shiva and the material energy, generally regarded as Shakti or Mother Durga, the universe is created.

The conclusive Vedic literature, however, maintains that demigods such as Lord Brahma and Lord Shiva are created by and subordinate to Lord Narayana, Vishnu, who is the creator of the material worlds and all ingredients thereof. The *Varaha Purana, Bhagavata Purana, Vishnu Purana,* and many others specifically state that Narayana is the Supreme Personality, and from Him Brahma was born, from whom Shiva was born. Therefore, the demigods are not the Supreme but only dependent agents of the Supreme who work under His direction. This is confirmed in many verses throughout the Vedic literature. Although in some places we may find that demigods like Shiva, Ganesh, Surya, Indra, etc., are described as the ruler and creator of all, we should understand that almost all prayers to the demigods use such terms. But the words should be taken in their etymological sense referring to Narayana, or Vishnu, who is the source of the power that the demigods have. Shiva's name as Pasupati means "Lord of all souls," Ganesh means "Lord of all beings," Surya means "the goal of the wise," Indra means "the supreme ruler," all of which ultimately refer to the Supreme Lord and that these demigods are His agents and represent the power of the Supreme.

The *Vedanta-sutras* point out various contradictions in the philosophy of the Pasupatas or Shaivites (*Vedanta-sutras* or *Sri Bhasya* 2.2.35-41). It concludes that if one is serious about attaining spiritual enlightenment and liberation, he must avoid this questionable philosophy, for in spite of the uncommon austerities and lifestyle of the Shaivites, their destination after death is not certain. The reason is that, though they may worship Shiva as the Supreme Being, they generally believe that God is an unembodied void into which they try to merge. Many of them accept Shiva or any other deity as simply being a material manifestation of that void or Brahman. Thus, their understanding of the Absolute Truth is faulty, and the process they use for spiritual realization is misdirected.

We should point out, however, that the Vedic literature establishes Lord Shiva as one of the topmost devotees of Lord Vishnu or Krishna. Shiva is often pictured in meditation, and many verses from the *Puranas* explain that he is always meditating on the Supreme, Sri Krishna. This means that Shiva is a Vaishnava of the greatest caliber. Furthermore, he is also one of the most important demigods in the universe. Therefore, as long as one understands Lord Shiva's real position and avoids the impersonalistic philosophy that most Shaivites follow, there certainly is no harm in worshiping or offering respects to Lord Shiva or visiting the temples dedicated to him. In this case, worshiping Lord Shiva is simply offering respects to a superior devotee of God who can help one along the way. In fact, as we have explained earlier, respect for Shiva is beneficial for such advancement.

There are many other sects of the Shaivites besides the Pasupatas. The Pratyabhijna Shaiva sect is from Kashmir. They were systematized by Vasugupta (800 CE) based on the *Shivasutra* and *Spandakarika.* The latter was expanded by the commentaries of Somananda, Utpaladeva, Abhinavagupta, and Kshemaraja, who wrote the summary teachings in his *Pratyabhijnabridaya*.

The Virasaiva or Lingayatas was another sect. There was little notice of this sect until Basava, a brahmana from Kannada developed it. They may have developed from the Kalamukhas and worshiped the *linga*.

The Shaiva Siddhantas was another sect in South India, having originated in the 11^{th} and 13^{th} centuries. They used Sanskrit texts, but these were later overshadowed by the Tamil texts of the Nayanmar poets, which lent to its *bhakti* or devotionally oriented system.

Additionally, there was also the Lakulisha Pasupatas who were also ascetics. The Kapalikas dwelled in the cremation grounds. Kalamukhas were ascetics similar to the Pasupatas. The Kashmir or Trika Shaivites had a threefold concept of God: namely Shiva, the *shakti* energy, and the *anu* or individual. The *smarta* or orthodox of Shaivism practiced the *varnashrama* system as enunciated in the *smriti* literature and the *Manu-samhita* and *Kalpa Sutra*. The Natha or Kanphata yogis were a Shaiva sect said to be founded by Goraknatha. This blended the Pasupata system with Tantric practices and hatha yoga.

Shaivism essentially consists of believing and accepting that Shiva is the Absolute, that he is transcendental to time and space, and pervades all energy and existence. Shaivites believe that once the influence of *maya* and karma are removed, they will be free from the bondage that prevents them from perceiving that their spiritual identity is equal to Shiva. They chant obeisances to Shiva on a regular basis, such as "Om Namaha Shivaya," or simply "Namashivaya." Shiva is known to bless his devotees with material opulence if he is pleased. And he can be easily pleased or quickly angered. Yet, many people offer worship of some kind to Shiva and Durga generally in hopes of acquiring blessings for material facility.

The basic process of Shaivism, summarized as follows, particularly of the Saiva Siddhanta school, consists of: 1) maintaining virtue, 2) doing service and worship, 3) yoga, meditation, 4) acquiring knowledge, and then attaining enlightenment and Self-realization.

To elaborate a little, the first step includes maintaining virtue and purity, which means to cause no injury to any creature, do no stealing, and maintain honesty, truthfulness, proper conduct, patience and dedication, compassion, and control of the appetite. However, these are the basics of karma-yoga as well as the building blocks of any spiritual process.

The second step includes maintaining discipline in *sadhana,* or in one's spiritual practice and habits. This is when we control the mind and absorb our consciousness in the higher purpose of life and activities. This is also called *kriya*, regulated exercises or methods. There is also worship of the image of the divine or the deity to invoke the dormant spiritual love within us. Going to the temple or *ashrama* to participate in the *puja,* worship, and to joyfully absorb oneself in hearing the Vedic wisdom and chanting or singing is also included.

The third step includes the performance of yoga in which a person practices *pranayama* and *pratyahara,* breath control to steady the mind and senses, and withdraw them from external distractions. Then through concentration and meditation the practitioner becomes aware of God within. Through this practice, the *kundalini* may also become active, rising through the *chakras.* One's doubts, faults, mental weaknesses and ignorance, even past karma, become reduced. Then ecstasy and the divine energy are aroused. Ultimately, this is meant to give

way, with practice, to *nirvikalpa samadhi,* or the experience of the timeless and formless Parashiva.

The fourth step is when a person becomes enlightened and Self-realized. In this sate, divine wisdom is a part of one's every move. Though still living in this mortal world, the person knows and also perceives that he is not of it. He is of a different, transcendental nature. This is a result of all his practice, austerity, *sadhana,* and devotional love. No more does such a yogi experience the limitations of the mind or ordinary intellect. He is free of it, or liberated, a *jivanmukta,* a liberated soul.

This process, as described in the above paragraphs, includes the basic steps that you will find in most forms of yoga, no matter whether it is applied directly to Shaivism or not. However, in this day and age, being able to take this system to its full perfection is not easy, and to attempt it thinking one can do so may be misleading. Nonetheless, as anyone can see, the basic steps of this process include qualities and practices that can enhance anyone's life and assist in whatever spiritual path is being pursued.

THE SHIVARATRI FESTIVAL

One festival that all worshipers of Shiva take part in is Shivaratri. The night of Shiva is a festival that is held in the typical pattern of preparation, purification, realization, and then celebration. On the day of the festival, people will fast and spend the day focused on Shiva, meditating and chanting "Om Namaha Shivaya." Thus, offering their obeisances to Lord Shiva, the mind is held in such single-pointed concentration throughout the day. Then at the stroke of midnight Shiva is said to manifest as the inner light of purified consciousness. This climax at night represents our overcoming the dark ignorance and reaching the state of purified spiritual knowledge. Therein we conquer the influence of the mind and senses, exhibited by staying awake all night, and enter the state of steady awareness wherein there is spiritual awakening. If one can follow this process, then he or she can experience the real meaning of Shivaratri.

THE SHIVA-LINGAM

One thing you may be questioning is why Lord Shiva is so often represented as a *lingam*. *Linga* basically means a sign or symbol. So, the *lingam* is essentially a symbol of the shapeless universal consciousness of Lord Shiva. "Shiva" also means that in which the creation lies dormant after the annihilation. So, one explanation is that the *lingam* is a representative of the dormant universal consciousness in which all created things rest after the cosmic annihilation. It also represents the *pradhana,* the potential but unmanifest ingredients of the material world. Another explanation is that Shiva means auspicious. So, the *linga* is the shapeless symbol for the great god of auspiciousness. It is intended to bring the shapeless unknown into our attention.

A line of *lingas* around the large Shiva temple in Tanjore, India.

linga being worshiped with Ganga water, Khajurao, India.

The *yoni* upon which the *lingam* often sits represents the manifest universal energy. From the unmanifest comes the manifest energy, through which all other things are created. The *yoni,* which is a symbol of Shakti, combined with the *lingam*, is a symbol of the eternal union of the paternal and maternal principles, or the positive and negative, or the static and dynamic energies of the Absolute Reality. It is the communion of the eternal consciousness and dynamic power of the Shakti, the source of all actions and changes. It is also the symbol for the creation of the universe through the combination of the active energy of Lord Shiva and his Shakti. This is how Lord Shiva and Durga are considered the parents of the universe. The symbolism of the *lingam* and *yoni* also represents the base of the spine, meaning the Muladhara *chakra,* upon which the *kundalini* is resting, waiting for awakening.

There are a few versions according to the *Puranas* of why Shiva is worshiped as a *lingam* and how this happened, of which I will relate one. There was a great sacrificial ceremony that was going to take place many hundreds of years ago. The great sage Narada Muni was invited to it and asked who would receive the effects of the sacrifice. No one could answer, so the sages who were present asked

him who should receive it. Narada said that Sri Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva were all eligible, but they would have to find out which one had the most patience and purity to be the receiver of the sacrifice. So, he chose the great sage Brighu to learn the answer.

Brighu had many mystic powers and was able to travel to the domain of the demigods. So, first he went to see Lord Brahma, but Brahma was preoccupied and did not notice Brighu's presence. Feeling insulted, Brighu cursed Brahma, "You are so proud of your power of creation, you did not notice my arrival. For this you shall have no temples on earth." Thus, there are very few temples of Brahma on earth. Next, Brighu went to see Shiva in Kailash, but Shiva also did not notice Brighu's arrival. Brighu, again feeling offended, cursed Shiva to be worshiped only as a *lingam* on earth. This is the reason why Lord Shiva is primarily represented and worshiped as a *lingam* on this planet instead of a personalized deity.

Then, to continue the story, Brighu went to see Lord Vishnu, who also did not recognize Brighu's presence. Brighu was so angered that he went forward and kicked Vishnu's chest. Lord Vishnu apologized if He had hurt Brighu's foot and began praising Brighu. Brighu immediately felt pleased and could understand that Vishnu was actually the most qualified to receive the offerings from the sacrifice. However, Lakshmidevi, the goddess of fortune and Lord Vishnu's wife, was very displeased by Brighu's action and, therefore, does not bestow much mercy on the brahmanas who, as a result, are often without much money.

To explain the shape of the *lingam*, a Baana *linga* is egg-shaped and is meant to show that Ishvara has neither beginning nor end. The Lingobhavamurti form of the *linga* is said to be the prime manifestation of the form of the formless, which Shiva is said to have manifested exactly at midnight on Shivaratri. This is why everyone stays up until midnight and then worships that form during the Shivaratri festival. A representation of the Lingobhavamurti can often be found in a niche on the outside wall of the sanctum in any important Shiva temple.

The *lingas* in the temples are often formed in three parts. The lowest part is the base square called the Brahmabhaga or Brahma-pitha, which represents the creator Brahma. The next part in the middle is the octagonal Vishnubhaga or Vishnu-pitha, which signifies Lord Vishnu the sustainer. Both of these parts

form the pedestal. The top cylindrical portion is the Rudrabhaga or Shiva-pitha, which is also called the Pujabhaga since this is the worshipable part. The top portion is also meant to symbolize the projecting flame of fire. This flame also represents the destructive aspects as well as the preserving power of God.

There are twelve important Jyotirlinga or self-manifesting *linga* temples scattered across India. They are found at Kedarnatha, Kashi Visvanatha, Somnatha, Baijnath, Ramesvare, Ghrisnesvar, Bhimasankar, Mahakala, Mallikarjuna, Amalesvar, Nagesvar, and Tryambakesvar. The five Pancha Bhuta Lingas in India are located at Kalahastisvar, Jambukesvar, Arunachalesvar, Ekambesvara at Kanchipuram, and Nataraja at Chidambaram. The temple of Lord Mahalinga at Tiruvidaimarudur (Madhyarjuna) is also a great temple in South India.

The reason Lord Shiva is often worshiped by pouring Ganges water over the *lingam* is that it represents the Ganges descending from heaven on to Shiva's head. The legend is that when the Ganges first began to flow to the earthly planet from the heavenly region, the force of it would have destroyed the earth. To prevent this, Lord Shiva agreed to let the river first fall on his head before it formed into a river. It is also explained that when worshipers pour milk or Ganga water on the *linga,* it represents the pouring of ghee on the sacred fire in the fire ceremony, or *yajna.* This is the symbolic offering of ourselves to God.

One story in connection with the Shiva *linga* is found in the *Linga Purana.* It describes that once Lord Brahma, the god of creation, and Lord Vishnu, the God of protection, engaged in an argument on who was greater. When those two great gods were fighting between themselves, Lord Shiva appeared as a huge pillar of fire that spread across the universe. He told Brahma and Vishnu that whoever finds the head or foot of his form of flame would be considered greater. Then Brahma took the form of a swan and set out to reach the top of the flame. Vishnu took the form of a boar to seek out the foot of the fire. But in spite of their efforts, they could not succeed in finding the limits. They realized their mistake and the peerless greatness of Lord Shiva. This shows how Shiva cannot be approached through ego, but responds with love to those who surrender to him. In this pastime, Lord Shiva appeared in the form of the fiery *lingam* for their benefit. So, they were considered blessed with additional insight for

worshiping that oldest form of him. This form of Shiva who appeared from the flame is called Lingodbhava. This story is found in the *Shiva Purana* and other texts.

This further helps to show how the *lingam* is not formless nor really a form, but a symbol for the divinity of Lord Shiva. In Sanskrit, *linga* also means "mark." It is a mark or symbol of Lord Shiva in the same way that large puddles of water is an indication of heavy rains. It is an inference for something else, like the form of that which is formless and omnipotent.

THE GODDESS DURGA

Worship of the Goddess goes back at least 4000 years in India, and further back to the Vedic times. Durga is the Goddess of the universe, and Parvati, the wife of Lord Shiva, is a form of Durga. She has up to 64 different forms, with different names for each form. Each form represents a different pastime, power, or aspect of the Goddess. Some of the names of these forms of Durga are Ambika, Bhadra, Bhadrakali, Aryadurga, Vedagarbha, Kshemakshemakari, Naikabahu, Bhagavati, Katyayani, and others, such as Sati, which means chastity. In her gentle aspects she is worshiped as Kanya, Kamakshi, or Mukamba. Uma (Parvati) is the maiden name for the consort of Lord Shiva. She represents matter *(prakriti)*. Shiva is the god of destruction, which has no meaning without objects to destroy. Thus, he is paired with Uma.

The *Narada Purana* (1.3.13-15) lists many other names of Durga. Since she is considered one of the energies of the Supreme Lord, she is regarded as His *shakti,* and is called Uma, Bharati, Girija, and Ambika. The great sages designate her as Durga, Bhadrakali, Chandi, Mahesvari, Kaumari, Vaishnavi (supreme potency of Lord Vishnu), Varahi (potency of Lord Varaha, an *avatar* of Krishna), Aindra, Shambhavi, Brahmi (connected with Lord Brahma), Vidya (spiritual knowledge), Avidya (nescience), Maya (the illusory energy of the Lord), and Para Prakriti (the Supreme Primordial Nature).

A deity of Goddess Durga, multi-armed which chows her weapons and powers, wearing red cloth, and riding her lion carrier, in a temple in South Delhi.

Other aspects of Durga are accompanied by a different name and often a story

for each name. We will not relate each story, but some of the additional names can be summarized. These include Lalita, who is a beautiful Goddess, living eternally in the city of Shripura on Mount Meru with her spouse, Shiva Kameshvara. Annapurna is the form of Parvati who blesses the household with food. Aparajita means Durga as the invincible. Bala means the child. Bhadrakali is one of the aspects of Mahakali and the form that sprang from her wrath when her husband, Shiva, was insulted by Daksha, and who fought along with Virabhadra, the embodiment of Shiva's wrath, to destroy Daksha's sacrifice. Bhairavi is the Devi as the power to cause terror, one of the ten aspects of Shiva's energy. Bhavani is another name. Bhutatma is the Mother of the Bhutas or ghosts. Dakshayani is Durga as the daughter of Daksha. Gauri, means yellow or golden wife of Shiva. Indrakshi has eyes similar to Lord Indra's, and is often worshiped by Indra. She can also alleviate the incurable diseases when pleased by nice hymns. Jagadhatri is the one who sustains the world. Katyayani is the Devi who was once born as the daughter of Kata. Parvati is the daughter of Parvata, the personification of the Himalaya. Rudrani is wife of Rudra. Tripura Bhairavi is the *shakti* of Shiva when he is the ruler of death.

Durga is often pictured as a beautiful woman in red cloth. She may have four, eight, ten, eighteen, or twenty hands and three eyes. Items in her hands can include a conch, disc, trident, bow, arrow, sword, dagger, shield, rosary, wine cup, and bell, all of which represent her different potencies. She may also be standing on a lotus or riding a lion. The lion represents power, but also the animal tendency of greed for food and other sensual objects. Her riding on the lion represents that she keeps all such tendencies under complete control.

The full details of Durga can be found in the *Devibhagavat,* or another text called the *Durgasaptashati* which can be found as part of the *Markandeya Purana.* The name "Durga" means one who is difficult to know. Yet, being the mother of the universe, she can be approached through love. Love is also natural for her to give to her children.

Durga is the personification of the material energy, in which all materially conditioned living beings are absorbed in thoughts, actions and identity. She is also considered the power of sleep, or the *yoga-nidra* in which Lord Vishnu rests between creative cycles. She is also the personification of wisdom and

knowledge. Her energy permeates the universe. She also embodies sacrifice or penance and the highest knowledge. She is most beautiful, but at the same time fierce and terrible. She can dispel difficulties as well as kill the demons.

Another of her popular forms is Mahishasuramardini. In this form she is often pictured with eight arms, each with a weapon, and in the process of killing the demon Mahishasura in his form as a bull. She was generated out of the anger and powers of the gods, namely Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma, and others. And their weapons became her weapons. Thus, riding on her fierce lion, she fought and killed Mahishasura and his army. This demon represents the egotistical propensity that brute strength is all that is needed to acquire selfish desires. While fighting amongst the gods, he was succeeding, until their combined powers and will to fight was manifest in the form of the Devi as Mahishasuramardini, who then killed the demon.

Symbolically, Durga destroys the buffalo demon which represents *tamo-guna,* the dark quality of laziness, ignorance and inertia. So, she destroys the *tamo-guna* within each of us, which can be very difficult to overcome. Another one of her qualities is her wrath, which sometimes manifests as war. Such war cleanses the world of the many negative elements that accumulate from a sinful society.

Later, when the gods were challenged by the demons Shumbha and Nishumbha, they went to petition the Goddess again. This time, from the side of Parvati, she manifested herself as Kaushika Durga, also called Ambika. Ambika's beauty attracted the demons who then wanted to marry her. She vowed to marry the one who could defeat her in battle, but all such attempts were disastrous. Even with the assistance of giants like Dhumralochana, Chanda, Munda, and Raktabija, they were unsuccessful.

Then from the forehead of this Durga manifested the fierce, dark goddess Kali, who became known as Chamunda for beheading the demons Chanda and Munda. When she fought with Raktabija, it took a special endeavor because of his powers that caused each drop of his spilled blood to become another demon. It was Kali who managed to drink all of his flowing blood and prevent any additional demons from manifesting. Thus, Durga was able to kill him. She then easily killed Nishumbha, but Shumbha accused her of accepting help. The Devi then withdrew all her emanations into her one form, and then proceeded to

battle and kill Shumbha.

Durga is also called Vaishnavishakti, the creative power from Lord Vishnu, the original cause. She is also called Vindhyavasini (the one who lives in the Vindhya mountains), Raktadanta (the one with the red teeth), Shatakshi (who is liked to having one hundred eyes), Shakambhari (who gives the life-force of vegetables), Durgaa (the slayer of the demon Durga), Bhima (the ferocious), and Bhramaramba (one who is liked to having a form of bees).

Devi is also manifested as Maheshvari, which, according to the three modes of material nature, also manifests as Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasarasvati. These are different than the goddesses Lakshmi and Sarasvati, which will be discussed later. In the aspect of Mahakali she is considered the personification of the *tamo-guna*, or mode of darkness and sleep or inertia. She is also *maya,* the illusory energy of Lord Vishnu. Thus, this *maya* must be removed for us to awaken to our real spiritual identity. It is within this *maya* in which the seeming powers of evil and divisiveness exist. She is often pictured as blue in color with ten hands, each holding a different weapon, including a sword, disc, mace, arrow, bow, iron club, lance, sling, a human head, and a conch.

Mahalakshmi is the aspect of *raja-guna*, the passionate nature. In this aspect she is seen as red in color, signifying the will to fight evil forces. She has eighteen hands, holding a rosary, pot, club, lance, sword, shield, conch, bell, wine cup, trident, noose, and disc. She is the one who killed Mahishasura.

Mahasarasvati represents the *sattvic* aspect, or that of goodness and purity. She is light in color and has eight hands that hold a bell, trident, plough, conch, pestle, disc, bow, and arrow. She is the manifestation of beauty, work and organization. It is she, as Kaushika Durga, who manifested from Parvati. She is the one who destroyed the demons known as Dhumralochana, Chanda, Munda, Raktabija, Nishumbha, and Shumbha, all of which are certain aspects of the principle of ego.

Kali is another form of the goddess that is often seen in temples and pictures. She is usually pictured as nude except for being covered by her scattered hair. She has a dark complexion. She wears an apron of human hands and a garland of human skulls, and sometimes carries a human head in one hand, freshly severed

and dripping with blood, and a long chopper in another hand. The other two hands are giving blessings and offering protection. Her tongue is protruding, dripping with blood. She is also often seen in a cremation ground or in a battlefield amidst dead and mutilated bodies. Sometimes she is standing on the white or bluish body of her spouse, Shiva. He supplicates her in this way to keep her from destroying everything.

The meaning of all this is that, first of all, Kali represents time, Kala, which devours everything in its terrifying ways. She is naked because she is free from the veil of ignorance that the universe represents, which hides our real spiritual identity. She is black because she represents *tama-guna* or the void which has swallowed everything, including space, time, and the ingredients of material nature. Her apron of hands indicates that she is pleased with the offerings of our work, so she wears them. It also represents the inward potential for outward manifestation waiting to take place. Her disheveled hair simply represents her freedom to go and do as she likes. The garland of 50 skulls represents the 50 letters of the alphabet or sound, from which the whole material manifestation has sprung, and which is now in a state of destruction indicated by her wearing them. Though she is an awesome form, she is also offering freedom from fear by her hand gestures.

A further explanation of why Goddess Kali stands on Shiva is that once Kali engaged in a battle in which she destroyed all the demons. She danced in victory to such an extent that the worlds started to shake in destruction. Everyone became concerned and Shiva came to appease her from further dancing. Yet, she was so worked up that she could not notice or listen to him. So, Shiva laid like a corpse at her feet to absorb the shock of her movements, and when she finally noticed that she had stepped on her husband, she put her tongue out in shame.

THE IDENTITY OF DURGA AND DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MAHAMAYA AND YOGAMAYA

Being the personification of the material energy, Durga is also the maidservant of Lord Krishna, and conducts herself in accordance to the will of the Supreme. Her shadow is the material energy, *maya.* In this form of Durga, she is pictured

as a beautiful demigoddess with ten arms, representing the ten types of material activities. She rides on her lion, indicating her heroic activities. She is the subduer of vices, represented by the image of her trampling the demon Mahishasura. She is the mother of her sons Kartikeya and Ganesha, representing beauty and success. She is armed with twenty weapons, denoting the various pious activities enjoined by the *Vedas* for the suppression of vices. She also holds a snake, which signifies destructive time. The word *durga* also means a prison house or a fort. So, the material world is like a prison from which it is hard to escape. "Dur" means difficulty and "Ga" means going. So, it is very difficult to escape from this material world without undergoing many hardships. But one who takes shelter of the spiritual potency can get free from the illusory nature of the material world. Thus, when the living beings forget their spiritual nature and the service of the Supreme Being, Krishna, they are confined in the material prison of the universe. This is the aspect of the cosmic creation which is presided over by Durga. However, those who are devotees of the Lord and who are on the spiritual path to regain their real nature are free from this prison-like environment of the universe. Durga does not affect them.

The spiritual form of Durga is *Yogamaya.* The external form of Durga is *Mahamaya,* the illusory energy. The spiritual form of Durga who functions on the platform of *shuddha-sattva,* pure transcendental existence, is understood to be Krishna's sister, known as Ekanamsha or Subhadra.[9] The name Subhadra means auspicious. So, Subhadra also paves the way for the devotee's spiritual progress by supplying that which is auspicious and taking away all that is inauspicious. This is the spiritual form of Durga, the shadow of whom is the external material energy.

We should note, however, that Durga works in the material world. Subhadra plays the part of Lord Krishna's sister and is the internal or spiritual energy, and does not work as Durga in the material world. So, originally their energy is one and the same, but through her expansion as Durga she works in a different capacity within the material realm.

Furthermore, higher than Subhadra is Radharani, Lord Krishna's consort and the quintessence of spiritual energy. She is the personification, essence, and origin of Lord Krishna's pleasure potency, *hladini-shakti.* This pleasure potency

of Lord Krishna expands to become Radharani for the sake of the most intimate spiritual pastimes in Goloka Vrinadavana, the topmost spiritual planet. This potency expands further into the forms of Krishna's queens in the other Vaikuntha planets, and also as His sister, Subhadra, for other purposes and pastimes. And Durga is an expansion of this internal or spiritual energy. In this way, Durga also can be considered an expansion of Radharani. Therefore, Radharani is the source of the pleasure essence in the spiritual dimension, while Durga provides the means for all pleasure in the material realm.

So, herein we can understand that *mahamaya* in the material world is an expansion of *yogamaya* in the spiritual world. The difference in function is that *yogamaya* manages the spiritual sky, and in her partial expansion as *mahamaya* she manages the material world. *Yogamaya* covers the devotees in the spiritual world so that they can forget the Lord's greatness and engage in loving pastimes with Him as His friends, parents, servants, and so on without being overwhelmed by His omnipotence. *Mahamaya* in the material world, on the other hand, keeps the living entities forgetful of their true eternal nature as long as they have no spiritual inclination. It keeps them superficially content with material happiness. So, *yogamaya* helps bring the devotees together with the Supreme Being in various relationships while *mahamaya* keeps them separate, or at least makes it seem they are separate through the principle of forgetfulness.

THE TWO ENERGIES OF MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL

Another way to understand this is that there are two divisions of energy, the material and spiritual. The original energy is the spiritual, in which is the *hladini-shakti* potency of Krishna, which is His pleasure potency. It is this pleasure potency from God through which all spiritual joy and happiness are felt. This is also the original form of Durga who is nondifferent from this spiritual energy, but Durga is her form in the material world. The partial expansion of the *hladini-shakti* potency is *mahamaya,* which also acts like a covering for the *hladini-shakti* potency, which is also the pleasure of our spiritual nature and connection with the Supreme. In the material world she bewilders the conditioned souls so they can think they are happy in material pursuits. In this way, the materialists

remain covered over by their attraction to their desires for sense pleasure due to *mahamaya,* and the devotees and transcendentalists become absorbed in spiritual pleasure through *yogamaya*, or the *hladini-shakti.* It is through *yogamaya* that the religious become happy or joyous in their spiritual pursuits and liberated from the material realm. This is the work of Subhadra who provides what is auspicious and takes away what is inauspicious for the sincere seekers on the spiritual path. Thus, the material energy is like a testing ground that must be passed before one can gain entrance into the spiritual world. It also protects the spiritual atmosphere from those who are not sincere. This is also one of the functions of Durga.

In the *Brahma Vaivarta Purana (Krishna-Janma-Khanda,* 118.35) Durga talks with Shiva about how she is an expansion from the highest realms and explains herself in this way: "I am Mahalakshmi in Vaikuntha, Srimati Radha in Goloka, Shivaa [connected with Shiva] in the region of Shiva, and Sarasvati in the abode of god Brahma." Thus, from the highest levels of the spiritual domain she expands herself to include all other *shaktis* or potencies.

The *Narada Purana* (1.3.27) also explains that in regard to Lord Vishnu, "His Shakti is the great Maya, the trustworthy upholder of the universe. In view of its being the material cause of the universe, it is [also] called*prakriti* by scholars."

This illusory energy, *maya,* plays an important part in the creative process of the cosmic manifestation. In the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (3.5.25), Maitreya explains to Vidura that the external energy works as both cause and effect in the cosmic manifestation. This external energy is known as *maya* or illusion, and through her agency only is the entire material manifestation made possible.

Maya is the external energy of the Lord and is divided into two parts. *Maya* is the efficient cause, and the other part are the ingredients that create the cosmic manifestation, known as the *pradhana* or *prakriti*.[10] The *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (10.63.26) relates that in the *pradhana* aspect, *maya* is composed of time, activity, providence (the destiny of the conditioned souls) and nature. These along with the vital force or energy, the subtle material ingredients, and the material nature, known as the field of activity for the conditioned souls, and the eleven senses (the senses of perception and organs of action) and five elements (earth, air, fire, water, and ether), are the ingredients of *maya*. Thus, Lord

Krishna is the creator and *maya* only helps Him as an instrument. It is this *maya,* or material nature, which the Lord glances over which becomes agitated, and into which the Lord injects the seed of life as the original living entities. Thereafter, due to the reactions of the Lord's glance and His energy that mixes with *maya,* the material energy gives birth to the myriad universes.[11]

So, *maya,* or material nature, is merely the secondary cause of the creation. Nonetheless, it serves two purposes: It contains the subtle material elements, and then through the changes that take place causes the material manifestation. The *Brahma-samhita* (5.19) also explains that the primary material elements were originally separated. Then through the spiritual power of the Supreme, in His knowledge potency, *maya* was moved. It is through this combination of the efficient or spiritual potency in conjunction with the inactive material causal principles of *maya* that the elements and the different entities develop into a state of cooperation. Thus, it is by this combination of energies that the material creation can manifest, and the spiritual living beings appear as the materially conditioned souls within the material elements of the creation. In a graphic description, it is explained that *maya* appears like a huge pot filled with the innumerable universes that are like mustard seeds within it.[12]

Another function of *maya* is to cover the living beings with the material energy, and, thus, keep them in illusion as to what is their true identity. This sort of forgetfulness is one of the main principles of the material world, without which the living beings could not engage in material life. After all, if it was too obvious to the living beings that they are spiritual entities, they would not be satisfied with material pursuits or the engagement of bodily sense pleasures. So, to help provide a playground for the materially conditioned souls who are rebellious and want to live outside of God's kingdom, this forgetfulness must be there. This is the third function of *maya,* which covers the living entity in this way. As explained in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (8.14.10), "People in general are bewildered by the illusory energy *[maya],* and therefore they try to find the Absolute Truth, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, through various types of research and philosophical speculation. Nonetheless, they are unable to see the Supreme Lord."

This is further explained as follows: The internal potency of the Supreme Lord

is spiritual. The marginal potency consists of the living beings who can lean toward either the spiritual or material energy. The third potency of the Lord is the material energy itself, *maya,* also called nescience or darkness. It is this *maya* which makes the living entity godless and fills him with the desires for fruitive activity and sense pleasure. Thus, because of being influenced by the nescient potency, which covers his spiritual position, he suffers the threefold miseries of material existence.[13] These three kinds of miseries of material existence include those that come from the body itself, those caused by other living beings, and those problems caused by natural occurrences.

Because of being illusioned like this, the living entities cannot understand the truth of the creation and, thus, they wander throughout the material world for many lifetimes. However, the living beings are independent in determining whether they want to engage in material or spiritual activities. Misusing this independence to turn toward the dark side separates the living beings in varying degrees from the spiritual light. Yet, when the living beings turn toward God and work to regain their spiritual nature, they can return to their normal spiritual state of being and be relieved of material existence.

Actually, the spiritual living beings are merely covered by this cloud of *maya,* which affects their consciousness. Therefore, the goal of any genuine spiritual path is simply to remove this cloud and the influence of the illusory energy. If a religious system cannot do that, then it is incomplete.

The *Brahma-samhita* (5.44) also explains that *maya* is like the shadow of the Lord's *chit* or knowledge potency, and is also worshiped in the form of Durga, the creating, preserving, and destroying agency of this material world.

THE SHAKTAS AND TANTRISM

The Shakta tradition is another of the three major traditions of the Vedic culture. The power or energy of Shiva is Shakti, the embodiment of power. She is the power and support of the entire universe. Thus, she is the Universal Mother. He who worships Shakti or the divine feminine energy is a Shakta. In this tradition Shiva represents the eternal consciousness, while Shakti represents mind and mater. The Shaktas are those who believe that the original active and creative principle of existence is the divine energy called *shakti.* Shakti is the feminine energy inherent in everything throughout the universe and is considered the companion of Lord Shiva in her personified form.

The original ideas of the Shakta belief can be traced back to the *Rig Veda* and other later works. However, the *Vedanta-sutras* (2.2.42-45) point out some essential faults with the Shakta philosophy. For example, to consider that Shakti or energy alone can be the independent cause of the world is not a complete understanding. The reason is that energy alone cannot create without the cooperation, direction, and facility from the energetic, which, in this case, is the Creator or Supreme Being. Energy must have a source, meaning the energetic. Thus, as we have explained in the previous section, this Shakti is ultimately the energy of the Supreme Lord. She is not nor can be the sole cause of the world. She works most closely with the energy of the Lord in the form of Lord Shiva.

The Supreme is the energetic or source and controller of the energy, just as the powerhouse is the source of the electrical energy that is controlled to illuminate so many light bulbs. Thus, energy cannot exist without the energetic. Therefore, the followers of the Shakti cult who have imagined that energy is the cause of the world are not supported by conclusive Vedic authority. It is not possible that merely by energy alone all the elements of the universe can be produced. In the same manner, we do not see a woman produce children without the contact of a man. Only through the energy given by the seed of a man can there be conception in a woman. Similarly, only if Shakti or nature is controlled and directed by the contact of the *purusha,* God, can there be the organized formation of the material elements. In this way, everything proceeds from the

Supreme Being, as explained elsewhere in Vedic literature, and Shakti is not independent.

The Shaktas are divided into two groups, one called the Right-hand, the other called the Left-hand group. The Right-hand or *dakshinachara* are the ascetic group, while the Left-hand or *vamachara* are those who combine their yogic exercises with practices that are often considered more unorthodox, called the *panchamakara,* or the five "M"s. These are *madya* (wine drinking), *mamsa* (meat-eating), *matsya* (fish), *mudra* (parched grain), *maithuna* (ritual sex), and also ceremonial songs. In most cases, the drinking of wine, eating meat, and sexual activities are meant to be used as part of a sacrificial rite in the worship of goddess Kali or Durga.

Tantraism is linked with yoga and the magical formulas of the *Atharva Veda.* The ascetic process of the Tantric path is very similar to the raja yoga and kundalini yoga systems. But before going on to the advanced stages, one must perfect the basics, such as simplicity, kindness, devotion, prayer, and self-analysis, along with the *yama* and *niyama* principles as described in raja yoga.

Tantra is a path meant to utilize all the sciences to develop psychic power, understand reality, and expand one's awareness in all states of consciousness. In this way, all levels of consciousness are to be explored by performing various kinds of exercises and techniques. However, the training and procedures that some Tantric yogis may have to do as a sign of advancement can be a dreadful experience for one who is psychologically unprepared. Detachment from the body and advancement on the path is attained by the performance of what most people would consider unusual if not bizarre practices. In Tantrism, particularly the Left-hand path, progress and liberation are achieved primarily through direct experience rather than through meditation. The ingredients and experiences in the rituals are also to induce different levels of consciousness.

Once the Tantric yogi has mastered all the basic requisites of yoga, such as the sitting postures, controlling the external and internal organs, and keeping the mind from all material attractions and repulsions, then he can continue with more arduous austerities. He may be instructed to go to the cremation grounds and search through the ashes to find and eat particular parts of a corpse that do not burn. He must do this without the slightest disgust. These more extreme

practices were mostly for the adepts who were experienced in the Left Hand path. These would induce a deep level of detachment from praise, pride, or even shame or disgust, and all that might keep one from entering the Supreme bliss. These practices are metaphorically called "removing a thorn with a thorn." It is to break social norms in order to transcend limitations of body consciousness and attain Shiva. The path of the Right Hand Tantric is not as extreme and uses tamer or more harmless symbolism in rituals, or ignores the severe rituals altogether.

Some of the Tantric followers also practice magic and alchemy in their techniques. It is well known that Tantrics who know the art of magic can possess amazing but dark powers. The apparel of such sorcerers usually include items like flayed animal or human skin as coverings, necklaces of teeth or bone, a girdle of snake skin, and they sometimes cover themselves with the ashes of cremated bodies or the dirt from an exhumed corpse. Elements used in their rituals may consist of charred bones, eyeballs, fat, marrow, and even excrement from corpses, along with mantras used to call or address the dead or even demons and ghouls. The Tantric may also make a human skull into his eating bowl, or the top of a monkey skull as a drinking cup. The human thighbone is also used among some as a horn for calling spirits. With these kinds of items they perform ceremonies such as the black ritual that is a secret and dangerous short path to attaining occult power.

One ritual on this path in Tibetan is called the *chod,* in which the Tantric practitioner goes to the crematorium and invites spirits to feast on his body, which symbolizes destruction of ego, pride, selfishness, fear, *etc.* The Tantric should be so focused on this that he can actually hear the ghouls masticating as they devour his flesh. After the spirits have dined and departed, the Tantric, recovering from the ordeal, mentally reassembles his bones and organs until he is whole again. Another aspect of this black ritual is known in Tibet as *rolangs,* in which the Tantric, through occult powers, animates a dead corpse by calling spirits to possess it and then asks it questions or uses it for magical purposes.

If the yogi remains sane and continues on the Left-hand Shakta or Tantric path, he may also try to perform the sex ritual. In this case, the Tantric yogi worships the woman as a representation of Shakti and accepts the role as Shiva

and has intercourse with her, but does not ejaculate any semen. The Tantric controls his mind and senses, and during intercourse constricts his stomach muscles in particular ways so that he takes in the fluid and energy released by the woman. Thus, he keeps the combination of his male energy and the female energy at the base of his spine. By combining the male and female energy in such a way, the practitioner is said to get special power and enlightenment. This is also supposed to help awaken the *kundalini* at the base of the spine when it is time for the yogi to begin meditation. However, some descriptions of these sex practices are very strange, and the texts that describe them are quite graphic. It has also been said that even Marco Polo, while witnessing these Tantric practices and acts of sorcery during his explorations of the world, did not consider it fit to give a full account of what he saw. This, however, is only one aspect of the Tantric cult. Other more prominent techniques include mantra, *pranayama,* meditation, etc, as has already been described.

These days in the West people use certain Tantric practices as an excuse to simply engage in sex in the name of so-called spiritual exercises, religion or yoga. Although they hardly know anything about the real Tantric practices or bother to reach any of the initial yogic qualifications one must attain, they are very eager to engage in so-called Tantric sex with the hopes of increasing the duration of their orgasm. This, however, was the exact opposite of the real purpose of the ritual. Extended orgasm is considered to deplete the yogi of his mystic powers and mental and psychic capacity. Even Buddhist texts mention that keeping the seed (semen) is life, while the falling of the seed is death. In this way, by retaining one's semen, a man can become very powerful.

THE TANTRAS

When explaining the *Tantras,* the root *tan* means to expand. Thus, *tantra* means to expand the meaning of the Vedic knowledge. The *Tantras* are the texts studied by those, especially amongst the Shaiva and Tibetan Buddhist Vajrayana cults, who worship Shakti, the Goddess personification of the universal feminine energy. These *Tantras* can be dialogues between the goddess Durga and Shiva. When the Goddess asks Shiva questions, they are called *Agamas,* and when Shiva asks the Goddess questions, they are *Nigamas.* The *Agamas* contain descriptions of a variety of topics such as deity making, temple and altar construction, *etc.* They may also elaborate on the five main topics which include the creation, universal annihilation, worship of the gods, the attainment of the six superhuman faculties, and the main methods of meditation that bring union with the Supreme. Certain *Tantras* also contain magical or mystical formulas that some practitioners use for their own purposes.

The *Tantras* generally accept Shakti as the creative force, worshipable as an aspect of the Divine but inseparable from the masculine principle, which is called Brahman by some and Shiva by others. However, the *Tantras* are often composed of irregular Sanskrit to obscure their secrets in the language. Also, in order to allow only the initiates to understand it's meaning, some of them used much erotic symbolism and esoteric terminology. This has led to a misunderstanding of its ideology as well as its practices, especially among westerners who perceive an overabundance of sexual connotation in it, which is not really there.

It is not easy to date the formation or appearance of the *Tantras.* It is suggested that they were predominately developed in North India and Assam. Some scholars have not been able to determine whether Tantrism originated in Buddhism or Hinduism, but evidence suggests that Tantrism was first systematized by particular Buddhist schools. This systematization seemed to have resulted in dividing Buddhism into several major and minor groups because of philosophical differences. All such groups assisted in laying the groundwork for various radical ideas, among which was Tantrism. Tantrism

greatly influenced the Vajrayana and Mahayana sects. Some scholars date the Buddhist *Tantras,* like the *Hevajra,* to sometime earlier than 400-700 CE. Other *Tantras* include the *Nityashoda-shikarnava, Yoginihridaya, Tantraraja,* and *Kularnava,* all dated between 1000-1400 CE, and the later *Mahanirvana Tantra.* However, those *Tantras* that are related to the older Vedic texts had to have been of an earlier date. For example, the *Narada-Pancharatra* is said to have been spoken by Lord Shiva to Narada Muni, and later compiled by Srila Vyasadeva 5,000 years ago.

There are, however, different *Tantras* for different people. There are specific *Tantras* for those who are in the mode of darkness or *tamo-guna* , others for those in the mode of passion or *rajo-guna*, and still more for those in the mode of goodness, *sattva-guna*. There are the Shaiva *Agamas,* the Shakta *Agamas,* and the later Tibetan Buddhist *Agamas,* as well as the *Linga, Kalika* and *Devi Puranas.* The *Agamas* are divided in four parts: metaphysical knowledge, yoga, ritual practices, and conduct. There are 28 Shaiva *Agamas,* 77 Shakta *Agamas,* and 108 Pancharatra or Vaishnava *Agamas.* The Vaishnava *Tantras* include the *Narada-pancharatra, Pancharatra, Vaikhanasa,* the *Gautamiya Tantra, Brihad-Gautamiya Tantra,* and others like the *Lakshmi Tantra.* These contain rules and regulations for engaging in the process for purifying the mind of the stumbling blocks of material attachments and for fixing the consciousness on the qualities and spiritual pastimes of the Supreme. The *Narada-Pancharatra* deals with Lord Krishna and some about Radha. Ramanuja wrote his *Agama-pramanya* to show the Vedic connection of the Vaishnava *Pancharatra* texts.

The difference in the Vaishnava *Tantras* from the *Tantras* of the Left-hand Shaktas is that they remove the illusion that the physical body is the self, along with the need for performing unorthodox bodily activities for spiritual advancement, while the Left-hand Shaktas are attached to the means of using the body to attain magical powers, rapid illumination, wealth, high position, or quick liberation. To be successful on the Left-hand path is very difficult and the aspirant can rarely persevere to the end. As we can easily see from our partial description of the Tantric Left-hand path, such philosophy and activities are deeply imbedded in the mode of darkness, *tamo-guna.* This may be the level of experience that some people need in this life, but by tampering with this path,

one usually increases his illusion, selfishness and pride, or it can bring disease, evil-mindedness, even insanity, and sometimes sudden death. This is not surprising since what is associated with the dark modes produces intense, dark, or questionable results.

The Vaishnava *Tantras,* on the other hand, are aimed at bringing one to a higher state of consciousness, a loftier awareness of our real identity as spiritual beings and our relationship with God without the unorthodox activities. It enables one to feel an inner joy and happiness by reawakening one's awareness of his or her spiritual identity. Soon the obstacles or material attachments and desires that seemed insurmountable have no effect. A serious follower can feel himself progressing very rapidly. As a person attains a higher spiritual taste, he becomes less concerned for bodily attractions and is content in any situation, whether it be in gain or in loss. His unity with God increases and he becomes perfectly satisfied. In this way, he soon leaves material consciousness behind and through his spiritual realizations reaches the perfectional stage of life.

HOW SHIVA AND DURGA ARE CONSIDERED THE MOTHER AND FATHER OF THE UNIVERSE

Since it is the glance of the Supreme Being over the energy of Durga, *maya,* which sets in motion the creation of the universes, Durga is therefore known as the Universal Mother.[14] This is why when people speak of the material nature, it is always referred to as a female, as "she", Mother Nature, and as the Goddess. And the essence of Mother Nature in the Vedic tradition is represented as Durga. She is united with her husband, Lord Shiva, who is then considered the father of the universe.

It is explained in the *Vayu Purana* that Shiva is an expansion of Sadashiva, who is a direct expansion of Lord Krishna. Sadashiva appears in order to perform various pastimes. Sadashiva is a resident of one of the eternal Vaikuntha planets of the spiritual world. His consort there is Ramadevi, a form of Lakshmi. She expands into *mahamaya* in the material worlds, where she is then known as Durga. Thus, the spiritual Sadashiva and Ramadevi again become related as Shiva and Durga, who are the origin of material nature.

The part that is played by Lord Shiva during the creation is more fully explained in the *Brahma-samhita* (5.6-8). Therein it states that Lord Krishna, the Lord of Gokula, the topmost planet in the spiritual sky, is the Supreme Godhead, the very Self of eternal ecstasies. He is busily engaged in the enjoyments of the transcendental realm and has no association with the mundane, illusory material energy. He does not stop His spiritual engagements. When He intends to create the material manifestation, He merely sends His glance over the deluding energy in the form of His time potency. Krishna's expansion in the form of Maha-Vishnu in the Causal Ocean carries this glance to the material energy. This glance from Maha-Vishnu is the efficient cause of the creation. The dim halo of this glance, the reflected effulgence, is Shiva in his form as Shambhu, who is the symbol of masculine mundane procreation. It is through this form of Shiva that the Supreme Lord associates with the material energy. In his role as Shambhu, he is the principle by which Maha-Vishnu impregnates the material nature with the seeds of the innumerable living entities. Otherwise, the Supreme Being has no association with the material energy.

The *Brahma-samhita* (5.10) goes on to explain that it is Shambhu, Maheshvara, who is the dim reflection of the Lord's glance, and lord of the *pradhana* who embodies the seed of all living beings. The *pradhana* is the unmanifest material ingredients that later form the cosmic manifestation. It is Shambhu who comes forth from the glance of the Lord. Shambhu is created from the space in between the two eyebrows of Maha-Vishnu. Furthermore, Shambhu then joins with *maya* in the form of the male organ or power of regeneration. But he can do nothing independent of the power of Maha-Vishnu, who represents the direct spiritual power of Krishna. Therefore, the necessary changes in the material energy cannot happen unless facilitated by the will of the Supreme Lord, Krishna. (Bs.5.15)

As further described *(Brahma-samhita* 5.16), the function of Shambhu in relation to the conditioned souls is that the mundane egoistic principle has originated from Shambhu. What this means, without trying to get complicated about it, is that the tendency for the individual living being to forget his spiritual identity comes from Shambhu. This forgetfulness makes the individual in this material world want to be an enjoyer of the material experience. This is because

he thinks he is the material body. This false identity makes all conditioned souls want to continue with their existence in the temporary, mundane world. This is the function of Shambhu, Shiva, in relation with the Supreme Lord Krishna's creative process. This principle of forgetfulness is then carried further by *mahamaya,* Durga, as previously explained.

However, to make it m ore clearly understood, Shiva is an expansion of the Supreme Lord, Krishna, as described above. He is not a second god that acts in place of Krishna. Those who think he is make an offense against the Supreme Being. Neither is he a *jiva,* a marginal spirit soul. As clearly explained in the *Brahma-samhita* (5.45), just as milk is transformed into curd by the action of acids, it is nonetheless neither the same as nor completely different from its cause, namely milk. So, the primeval Lord Govinda is from whom the state of Shambhu is a transformation for the work of destruction.

In other words, Lord Krishna manifests His energy through Maha-Vishnu whose glance produces the form of Shambhu, Shiva, in order to perform various tasks without having to give up His completely spiritual activities or come into direct contact with the material energy. It is through Shiva that the Supreme Being associates with His material energy in the form of *maya*. He does not do so directly. Thus, Shiva is not really different from Krishna, yet remains subservient to Him. The difference is like that of yogurt and milk. Yogurt is simply a changed form of milk, different in function simply by adding a certain acid. Similarly, the Supreme Being expands and changes into the distinct personality of Shambhu by the addition of a certain adulterated element to perform a particular function connected with the material energy. It is also this form of Shambhu from whom Rudra, another form of Shiva, is created from Lord Brahma later on in the creative process. [This is more thoroughly discussed in my book *How the Universe was Created.]*

So, here we have learned another aspect of how the spiritual energy expands to create the material energy. Thus, ultimately, everything comes from Lord Krishna. It is He who expands into the forms of Maha-Vishnu and then Shiva and Durga, who are considered the indirect mother and father of the universe, and are themselves expansions of Sadashiva and Ramadevi from the spiritual Vaikuntha worlds.

HOW LORD SHIVA ASSISTS IN THE UNIVERSAL DESTRUCTION

Another point, as previously mentioned, is that within the glance of Maha-Vishnu over *maya* is the element of time, which starts the agitation within the energy of *maya,* or the *pradhana.* This is what starts the process of creating and separating the various material elements. This element of time has been identified as Shambhu, the personality of the destructive principle. It is also this Shambu in the form of Rudra who later appears at the end of time to bring about the destruction of the universe.

So, Shiva is considered to be an expansion of the Supreme Lord Vishnu, Krishna, and is called Hara as such, and is transcendental to the material qualities. However, in his activities of destroying the world at the end of time, he is in touch with the mode of ignorance, or *tamo-guna,* and then he is considered as one of the living entities, called Rudra.

It is further explained that Lord Krishna expands a portion of His plenary portion, Lord Vishnu, who assumes the form of Rudra when it is time to dissolve the cosmic manifestation. Lord Vishnu does this for accepting the association of the material mode of ignorance. Thus, Rudra is but another expansion of the *energy* of Lord Krishna, although not a personal expansion. Rudra has various forms, which are transformations brought about by the different degrees of association with *maya.* Although Rudra is on a higher level than the *jiva-tattvas,* the individual living beings, he still cannot be considered a personal expansion of Krishna. Thus he is considered like an empowered *jiva* .[15]

Although many people worship Lord Shiva, Shiva worships Lord Krishna. The *Shiva Purana* states that Shiva is the Supreme, however, this is in regard to his power over the material world. After all, it is he who assists in the annihilation of the material creation, so he has power over the universe. But no scripture ever says that Shiva is the Supreme Lord of any of the Vaikuntha planets or of Goloka Vrinadavana, or any part of the spiritual domain. Such precincts belong only to Lord Krishna and His personal expansions. That is why Lord Shiva is always pictured absorbed in meditation. He is meditating on Lord Sankarshana, who is represented by the snakes on Shiva's body. Since Shiva is the origin of the mundane egoistic principle, one who is a worshiper of Lord Shiva as a devotee of

Sankarshana can be freed from the false, material ego.[16]

Shiva is often pictured doing his Tandava dance of destruction. He is seen with four hands and one leg up, as an expert dancer, and one leg dancing on a small person called the Apasmara-purusha. In two of his hands he holds the damaru drum and fire. The drum represents sound which is supported or carried by ether. This is a sign of further creation after the annihilation or destruction. Fire represents the Pralayagni, or the fire of universal destruction. Thus, Shiva holds the symbols of cyclical universal creation and annihilation. The other two hands represent protection and blessing for those who take refuge of him or his spiritual knowledge. The Apasamara upon whom Shiva stands symbolizes the ignorance that makes us lose our clarity and consciousness of our real identity. This also signifies our succumbing to the process of death without spiritual preparation. Shiva is shown dancing on this ignorance for the good of the devotees who take refuge.

Lord Shiva as Nataraj, king of dancers, doing his Tandiva dance that facilitates the destruction of the universe. This deity is located in the Government Museum in Delhi.

How Shiva assists in the cosmic annihilation is described in the *Puranas.* This process of cyclical destruction at the end of each day of Brahma is explained in the *Vishnu Purana* (Book Six, Chapters Three & Four). It states that at the end of 1,000 cycles of the four *yugas,* which is known as one day of Brahma called a *kalpa,* the earth is almost exhausted. A great scarcity of food ensues, which lasts 1 00 years. Because of the lack of food, all beings become weak and slow, and finally perish entirely. Lord Vishnu then assumes the character of Rudra (a form of Lord Shiva), the destroyer, and descends to reunite all of His creatures within Himself. He enters into the seven rays of the sun, causing all moisture in the oceans, rivers, soil, and living bodies to evaporate. The whole earth is dried up. Thus fed with abundant moisture the seven rays dilate into seven suns, the radiance of which glows everywhere and sets the three planetary systems and the lower system of Patala on fire. The three planetary systems become rugged and deformed throughout their mountains, rivers, and seas as they are consumed by these suns. The earth alone remains, destitute of moisture, resembling the back of a turtle.

Then Lord Hari, in the form of Rudra, who is the fire of time, destroyer of all things, becomes the scorching breath of Ananta Sesha, Sankarshana, and reduces the lower planetary system of Patala to ashes. The great roaring fire makes its way up through the universe to earth and destroys it. A vast whirlpool of flame then spreads to the higher region of the demigods and puts them all to ruin. The three planetary systems appear like a frying pan surrounded by flames that consume all things. The inhabitants of the upper planetary systems then mystically move higher to Maharloka, and when that becomes too hot, those who desire final liberation depart for the higher regions of Janaloka.

Elsewhere in the *Bhagavatam* (5.25.3) it explains how Lord Shiva plays a significant role in the final and ultimate annihilation of the universe, which takes place at the end of Brahma's life of one hundred of his years. "At the time of devastation, when Lord Anantadeva [Ananta Sesha, Sankarshana] desires to destroy the entire creation, He becomes slightly angry. Then from between His two eyebrows appears three-eyed Rudra, carrying a trident. This Rudra, who is known as Sankarshana, is the embodiment of the eleven Rudras, or incarnations

of Lord Shiva. He appears in order to devastate the entire creation."

The *Brahma Purana* (124.16) describes how it is the imperishable Lord Krishna who assumes the form of Rudra to bring all the elements and living beings back into Himself in the process of annihilation.

After Shiva appears in this way, he begins to do his dance of dissolution, dancing wildly to the beat of his drum. "At the time of dissolution, Lord Shiva's hair is scattered, and he pierces the rulers of the different directions with his trident. He laughs and dances proudly, scattering their hands like flags, as thunder scattered the clouds all over the world."[17] Lord Shiva's dancing causes such a commotion that it brings in the clouds that cause the universe to become inundated with water, which is what happens next as the process of annihilation continues (which I have fully described in my book, *The Vedic Prophecies).*

LORD SHIVA'S ULTIMATE SPIRITUAL ADVICE

In the *Sri Sanatkumara-samhita,* from the ancient *Skanda Purana,* we find a conversation between the great sage Sri Narada and Lord Sadashiva, the master of the demigods. Starting at text number 26 to text 30, Narada Muni asks Lord Sadashiva, "O master please tell what method the people of Kali-yuga may adopt to easily attain the transcendental abode of Lord Hari [Krishna]. O Lord, what mantra will carry the people from this world of birth and death? So everyone may benefit, please tell it to me. O Lord, of all mantras what mantra needs no *purashcharana,* no *nyasa,* no yoga, no *samskara* [processes of purification or initiation], and no other thing? A single utterance of the Lord's holy name gives the highest result. O master of the demigods, if I am competent to hear it, please kindly tell me the Lord's holy name."

In texts 31-35, Lord Sadashiva gives his answer: "O fortunate one, your question is excellent. O you who wish for the welfare of all, I will tell you the secret *chintamani* [wish-fulfilling] jewel of all mantras. I will tell you the secret of secrets, the most confidential of all confidential things. I will tell you what I have not told either the goddess or your elder brothers. I will tell you two peerless Krishna mantras that are the crest-jewels of all mantras. One is:

"'Gopijana-vallabha-charanau sharanam prapadye.' (I take shelter of the feet of He who is the gopi's beloved, Krishna.) This mantra has three compound words, five individual words and sixteen syllables.

"The second mantra is: 'Namo gopijana-vallabhabhyam.' (Obeisances to the divine couple, Sri Sri Radha-Krishna, who are dear to the *gopis.)* This mantra has two words and ten syllables.

In texts 36-41, Lord Sadashiva continues: "One who either with faith or without faith once chants this five-word mantra resides among Lord Krishna's *gopi*-beloveds. Of this there is no doubt. In chanting these mantras there is no need of *purshcharana, nyasa, ari-shuddhi, mitra-shuddhi,* or other kinds of purification. In chanting these mantras there is no restriction of time or place. All, from the lowest outcaste to the greatest sage, are eligible to chant this mantra. Women, shudras, and all others are eligible. The paralyzed, mute, blind, and lame are eligible. The Andhras, Hunas, Kiratas, Pulindas, Pukkashas, Abhiras, Yavanas, Kankas, Khashas, and all others even if born from sinful wombs are also eligible. They who are overcome with pride and ego, who are intent on committing sins, who are killers of cows and brahmanas, and who are the greatest of sinners, are also eligible. They who have neither knowledge nor renunciation, they who have never studied the *shruti-shastra* and other scriptures, and all others, whoever they may be, are also eligible to chant these mantras."

Then in texts 42-48 Lord Sadashiva explains who is not eligible and who should not be told these sacred mantras or the purpose of them: "Anyone who has devotion to Lord Krishna, the master of all masters, is eligible to chant these mantras, but they who have no devotion, even if they may be the greatest of sages, are not eligible. They who have performed many *yajnas* (rituals), given charity, visited all holy places, been devoted to speaking the truth, accepted the renounced order, traveled to the farther shore of the *Vedas* and *Vedangas,* devotedly served the brahmanas, taken birth in good families, and performed austerities and vows, but are not devoted to Lord Krishna, are not eligible to chant these mantras. Therefore these mantras should not be spoken to one who is not devoted to Lord Hari, nor to one who is ungrateful, proud, or faithless, nor to an atheist or a blasphemer. One should not speak these mantras to one who

does not wish to hear them, nor to one who has not stayed for one year in the speaker's ashrama. One should carefully give these mantras to one who is free from hypocrisy, greed, lust, anger, and other vices, and who is sincerely devoted to Lord Krishna. The sage of this mantra is Lord Sadashiva. The meter is Gayatri. The deity is Lord Krishna, the beloved of the *gopis*. The purpose is to attain service to dear Lord Hari."

The height of meditation, Sri Sri Radha and Krishna, as described by Lord Shiva. Here they share a swing in Their pastimes in Vrindavana.

In text 53 Lord Sadashiva says: "By once chanting this mantra one attains success. Of this there is no doubt. Still, for the purpose of chanting *japa* one should chant this mantra ten times daily."

In texts 54-77 of the *Sri Sanatkumara-samhita,* Lord Sadashiva describes the most nectarean meditation of the mantras, after which he continues with many additional topics in regard to the pastimes of Radha and Krishna and the importance of the land of Vrindavana:

"O best of brahmanas, now I will tell you the meditation of this mantra. I meditate on two-armed Lord Krishna, who is dark like a monsoon cloud, dressed in yellow garments, garlanded with forest flowers... crowned with a peacock feather, and garlanded with lotus whorls, whose face is splendid like ten million moons, whose eyes move restlessly... whose forehead is marked with the *tilaka* of sandal paste and musk... who is splendid with earrings like two rising suns, whose perspiration-anointed cheeks are like two glistening mirrors... who with raised eyebrows playfully glances at His beloved's face, the tip of whose graceful raised nose is decorated with a glistening pearl... whose bimba-fruit lips are splendid in the moonlight of His teeth, whose hands are splendid with bracelets, armlets, and jewel rings... who holds a flute in His left lotus hand, whose waist is splendid with a graceful belt, whose feet are splendid with graceful anklets... whose eyes are restless with the nectar of amorous pastimes, who jokes with His beloved, making Her laugh again and again... and who stays with Her on a jewel throne under a *kalpa-vriksha* [wish-fulfilling] tree in Vrindavana forest. In this way one should meditate on Lord Krishna and His beloved."

"On the Lord's left side one should meditate on Sri Radha, who is dressed in blue garments, who is splendid like molten gold... who with the edge of Her garment covers Her graceful lotus smile, whose restless chakori-bird eyes dance on Her beloved's face... who with Her forefinger and thumb places betel nuts and crushed betel leaves in Her beloved's lotus mouth... whose full, raised breasts are decorated with a glistening pearl-necklace, whose waist is slender, whose broad hips are decorated with tinkling ornaments... who is decorated with jewel earrings, finger rings, toe rings, bracelets, armlets, and tinkling golden anklets... whose limbs are graceful with the best of beauty, who is always in the prime of youth, and who is always plunged in the nectar of bliss. O king of brahmanas,

Her friends, whose age and qualities are like Hers, devotedly serve Her with *chamaras,* fans, and other articles."

"Please hear, O Narada, and I will tell you the meaning of these mantras. The material world is manifested by the Lord's *maya* potency and other external potencies. The spiritual world is manifested by the Lord's *chit* [spiritual knowledge] potency and other internal and everlasting spiritual potencies. The protector of these potencies is said to be the *gopi* Sri Radha, who is Lord Krishna's beloved. The transcendental goddess Sri Radha is the direct counterpart of Lord Sri Krishna. She is the central figure for all the goddesses of fortune. She is the pleasure potency of Lord Krishna. The wise say that She is the pleasure potency of Lord Krishna. Durga and the other goddesses in the world of the three modes are a million-millionth part of one of Her expansions. She is directly Goddess Maha-Lakshmi and Lord Krishna is Lord Narayana. O best of sages, there is not the slightest difference between Them. O best of sages, what more can I say? Nothing can exist without them. This universe made of spirit and matter together is Their potency. She is Durga and Lord Hari is Shiva. Lord Krishna is Indra and She is Shachi. She is Savitri and Lord Hari is Brahma. She is Dhumorna and Lord Hari is Yama. O Narada, please know that everything is Their potency. Even if I had many hundreds of years, I could not describe all Their glories." Thus, Lord Shiva encourages everyone in the most potent and practical way for making rapid spiritual development

CHAPTER NOTES

1. *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 4.24.22-28

2. Ibid., 4.24.29-30

3. Ibid., 4.30.10

4. Ibid., 4.7.50-54

5. Ibid., 8.12.43-44

6. Ibid., 10.71.8

7. Ibid., 10.88.3-5

8. Ibid., 10.88.12

9. Ibid., 10.22.4, pur.

10. *Caitanya-caritamrita,* Adi-lila, 5.58 & Madhya-lila, 20.271

11. Ibid., Cc.Adi-lila, 5.64-66

12. Ibid., Madhya-lila, 15.176

13. Ibid., Madhya-lila, 6.154-156

14. Ibid., Madhya-lila, 21.53

15. Ibid., Madhya-lila, 20.307-8

16. *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.2.21,pur.

17. Ibid., 4.5.10

CONCLUSION

All of the divine personalities that have been described herein are the main deities of the Vedic pantheon. Besides these *devas,* there are numerous other beings that are recognized for having a god-like status, or are the presiding personalities over areas of power, the directions, planets, or are special types of living beings. Others are those who live in higher dimensions or subtle realms. A few of these include beings like the *gandharvas* (angels), *apsaras* (heavenly dancing girls), *prajapatis* (progenitors), *siddhas* (the perfected beings expert in the mystic sciences), *vidyadharas* (wisdom bearing spirits), the *pretas* and *bhutas* (ghostly beings), *upanayikas* (fairies), and many other minor local village gods and goddesses that are emphasized according to the orientation and traditions of the people. So, what we have covered in this book are the main Divinities that are the most important to understand.

By reviewing the information that has been presented, we can begin to see that it is not so difficult to comprehend how each of the various Divinities of the Vedic culture have particular characteristics and blessings that they can offer to those who show respect or worship them. They all have specific purposes. Furthermore, they are not merely different representations of some vague power or amalgamated Absolute Truth. They all have their particular pastimes, positions and jurisdictions, or oversee certain universal powers of nature. Some of them also lead a person to deeper aspects of spiritual knowledge and truths, or can bless an individual with more insights and higher realizations. Thus, they all have a function and benefit that they can provide to someone for whatever is most needed by that person. And, ultimately, there is indeed, one Supreme Being that oversees everything and is the source of all.

The Vedic spiritual knowledge is not for a particular group, country, race, or people. It is for everyone. That is why it is also called Sanatana-dharma, it is a way of life. But it also means the eternal (Sanatana) nature (dharma) of us all as spiritual beings, which means that our eternal duty in whatever situation we find ourselves is to regain that spiritual knowledge of our real identity, and then realize that by actual perception and then act accordingly. That is real Sanatana-

dharma. That is beyond mere religiosity or moral standards. It is the highest level of spiritual understanding and perception. And becoming acquainted with the Vedic Divinities is only a part of that, for they are only there to assist us in various ways that we may need, both materially and spiritually.

APPENDIX ONE

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu The Most Recent Avatar

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu [pronounced Chaitanya] (February 27,1486 to 1534 CE) was born in Navadvipa, Bengal, on a full moon night during a lunar eclipse. It is typical for people to bathe in the Ganga River during an eclipse and chant the Lord's holy names for spiritual purification. So, everyone in the area was chanting the holy names when He was born. His parents, Jagannatha Misra and Sachidevi, gave Him the name of Vishvambhara, meaning the support of the universe, because astrologers had predicted His super human qualities and that He would deliver the people of the world. He was also nicknamed Nimai because He had been born under a *nima* tree.

During His childhood He exhibited extraordinary qualities, even having philosophical discussions with His mother. While growing, His brilliant intelligence began to become apparent. While still a child, He mastered Sanskrit and logic to the point of defeating local pundits, and established the truth of His spiritual wisdom and the Vedic philosophy. He became so well known that many logicians of various religious and philosophical persuasions began to fear His presence and refused to debate with Him. Thus, Sri Caitanya established the authority of the Vaishnava tradition through the process of debate and logic.

Then, when Sri Caitanya went to Gaya on the pretext to perform ceremonies for the anniversary of His father's death, He received Vaishnava initiation from Ishvara Puri. Thereafter, He lost all interest in debate and simply absorbed Himself in chanting and singing the names of Lord Krishna in devotional ecstasy. Upon returning to Navadvipa, He gathered a following with whom He would engage in congregational singing of the Lord's holy names. Thus, He

started the first *sankirtana* (congregational devotional singing) movement, and established the importance of chanting the names of God in this age as the most elevated of spiritual processes, and the prime means for liberation from material attachments.

At first, His chanting with people was for the few participants who were a part of His group, but then Sri Caitanya ordered that the ecstasy of love of God be distributed to all people of the area. He gave no recognition for the privileges of caste, or for position, or type of philosophy a person had, or yogic asceticism. He only emphasized the devotional chanting of the Lord's holy names, using the Hare Krishna mantra (Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare / Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare) which can bring out the natural loving sentiments for God.

It was at the age of 24 when He shaved His head and took the order of *sannyasa,* the renounced stage of life, when He accepted the name of Krishna Caitanya from Keshava Bharati during the initiation. He then spent four years traveling through South India, and also visited Vrindavana and Varanasi. During this time he also gave special instructions to Rupa and Sanatana Gosvamis, who then also spread the glories of the Divine Love for Radha and Krishna. They settled in Vrindavana where they spent their years in writing many books elaborating the instructions of Lord Caitanya and the glories of *bhakti* pr devotion for Radha and Krishna. They also revealed the places where Radha and Krishna performed many varied pastimes in that land of Vrindavana, which have remained special locations where devotees can become absorbed in the bliss of love of Radha and Krishna.

Lord Caitanya spent His remaining years in Jagannatha Puri. During this time He was absorbed in ecstatic devotion to Krishna in the loving mood of Radharani, in which He would lose all external consciousness. He freely distributed the divine nectar of this love for Krishna to everyone and anyone, day and night. Even His presence or mere touch could transform everyone that came near Him into the same devotional mood. He remained like this until He finally left our vision at the age of 48.

Lord Caitanya is considered and was established by Vedic scripture as the most recent *avatar* of God. The Lord always descends to establish the codes of

religion. This is confirmed in *Bhagavad-gita* (4.68) where Lord Krishna explains that although He is unborn and the Lord of all living beings, He still descends in His spiritual form in order to re-establish the proper religious principles and annihilate the miscreants whenever there is a decline of religion and a rise in irreligious activity.

Though there are many *avatars* and incarnations of God, all incarnations are known and predicted in the Vedic literature. Each one performs many wonderful pastimes. But in Kali-yuga, the Lord descends in the form of His own devotee as Sri Caitanya in order to show the perfect example of how devotional service should be performed, and to stress the chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra for this age by inaugurating the process of the *sankirtana* movement (congregational chanting).

Predictions of the appearance of Lord Caitanya can be found in many Vedic texts. One of the oldest prophecies concerning Sri Caitanya's appearance in this world is found in the *Atharva-veda* verse, starting as: *ito 'ham krita-sannyaso 'vatarisyami.* In this verse, the Supreme states: "I will descend as a sannyasi, a tall, fair, and saintly brahmana devotee, after four to five thousand years of Kali-yuga have passed. I will appear on earth near the Ganges shore and with all the signs of an exalted person, free from material desires. I will always chant the holy names of the Lord, and, thus, taste the sweetness of My own devotional service. Only other advanced devotees will understand Me."

Also, in a verse from the *Sama Veda*, starting as: *tathaham krita-sannyaso bhu-girbanah avatarisye,* the Supreme Being says that He will descend to earth as a brahmana-sannyasi at a place on the shore of the Ganges. Again and again He will chant the names of the Lord in the company of His associates to rescue the people who are devoured by sins in the age of Kali.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* (3.3) also relates the prophecy of Sri Caitanya in a different way. It states, "When one realizes the golden form of Lord Gauranga, who is the ultimate actor and the source of the Supreme Brahman, he attains the highest knowledge. He transcends both pious and impious activities, becomes free from worldly bondage, and enters the divine abode of the Lord."

Another prophecy of the appearance of Sri Caitanya is found in two verses in

the *Bhavishya Purana.* It states:

ajayadhvamaja yadhvam na sansayah
kalau sankirtana rambhe bhavisyami saci sutah

"The Supreme Lord said: 'In Kali-yuga, I will appear as the son of Sachi, and inaugurate the *sankirtana* movement. There is no doubt about this.'"

anandasru-kala-roma-harsa-purnam tapo-dhana
sarve mam eva draksyanti kalau sannyasa-rupinam

"O sage whose wealth is austerity, in the Kali-yuga everyone will see My form as a sannyasi, a form filled with tears of bliss and bodily hairs standing erect in ecstasy."

Another is from the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (3.12): "Mahaprabhu [the great master], the Supreme Being, is brilliantly effulgent and imperishable like molten gold, and [through *sankirtana]* bestows spiritual intelligence on the living beings. In the guise of a *sannyasi,* He is the source of spiritual purity and liberation."

It is also found in the *Vayu Purana:* "In the age of Kali I shall descend as the son of Sachidevi to inaugurate the *sankirtana* movement." This is also confirmed in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (11.5.32) where it states: "In the age of Kali, intelligent persons perform congregational chanting to worship the incarnation of Godhead who constantly sings the names of Krishna. Although His complexion is not blackish [like that of Lord Krishna], He is Krishna Himself. He is accompanied by His associates, servants, weapons, and confidential companions."

The great classic *Mahabharata (Vishnu-sahasra-nama-stotra,* 127.92.75) confirms that Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu is not different from Lord Sri Krishna: "The Supreme Lord has a golden complexion [when He appears as Lord Caitanya]. Indeed, His entire body, which is very nicely constituted, is like molten gold. Sandalwood pulp is smeared all over His body. He will take the fourth order of life [sannyasa] and will be very self-controlled. He will be distinguished from Mayavadi sannyasis in that He will be fixed in devotional

service and will propagate the *sankirtana* movement."

The *Caitanya-caritamrita* (Adi-lila, 3.19-20) also explains how the Supreme Lord Himself describes how He will appear as His own devotee to perform and teach devotional service by inaugurating the *sankirtana* movement, which is the religion for this age.

How He is the "great master" (Mahaprabhu) or will "bestow spiritual intelligence" is described in another *Upanishad.* This is one of the lesser *Upanishads* known as the *Chaitanyopanishad,* or *Sri Caitanya Upanishad.* This comes from the ancient *Atharva Veda.* In this description there is not only the prediction of His appearance but a description of His life and purpose, and the reasons why His process of spiritual enlightenment is so powerful and effective in this age of Kali. The *Chaitanyopanishad* is a short text with only nineteen verses. All of them are very significant.

The *Sri Caitanya Upanishad* (texts 5-11) explains that one day when Pippalada asked his father, Lord Brahma, how the sinful living entities will be delivered in Kali-yuga and who should be the object of their worship and what mantra should they chant to be delivered, Brahma told him to listen carefully and he would describe what will take place in the age of Kali. Brahma said that the Supreme Lord Govinda, Krishna, will appear again in Kali-yuga as His own devotee in a two-armed form with a golden complexion in the area of Navadvipa along the Ganges. He will spread the system of devotional service and the chanting of the names of Krishna, especially in the form of the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra;* Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

Another interesting story about the prediction of the appearance of Lord Caitanya in Kali-yuga is related in a lengthy conversation between Murari Gupta and Damodara Pandita, two contemporaries of Sri Caitanya. It is found in the *Sri Caitanya Mangala,* a biography of Sri Caitanya by Srila Locana Dasa Thakura. Among the many things they discuss are the symptoms and difficulties found in the age of Kali, how Lord Krishna appears on earth in this age, His confidential reasons for doing so, and how He revealed to Narada Muni His form as Lord Gauranga that He would accept while appearing on earth in this age. In this form He would distribute love of God to everyone He met by chanting the holy names.

This conversation is very enlightening.

Within this conversation they further relate an incident recorded as the *Vishnu-Katyayani Samvada* of the *Padma Purana.* This is a conversation between Lord Vishnu and Katyayani (Parvati), Lord Shiva's wife. The story is that one time the great sage Narada Muni acquired the *maha-prasada,* personal food remnants, of Lord Narayana, Vishnu, and gave a morsel to his friend Lord Shiva. Shiva tasted it and he began to dance in ecstasy, to the point of disturbing the earth. When he was approached by Parvati about why he was dancing so, he explained what happened. However, she was unhappy and angry that he did not share any with her. Being devoted to Lord Vishnu and concerned for the spiritual well-being of all conditioned souls, she then vowed that if she should get the blessings of Lord Vishnu, she would see to it that the Lord's *maha-prasada* was distributed to everyone. Just then Lord Vishnu Himself appeared and conversed with her. He assured her that He would appear in the world as Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu in the age of Kali and would keep her promise and spread His mercy in the form of *maha-prasada,* food that has been offered to Him, and the chanting of His holy names to everyone, distributing His mercy everywhere.

Another book is the *Sri Hari-bhakti-vilasa* by Sanatana Gosvami. Sanatana lived about 500 years ago in Vrindavana, India and was a great scholar of the Vedic scripture. A portion of the book contains an anthology of an amazing assortment of verses from the Vedic texts which predict the appearance of Lord Caitanya. Besides some of the quotes we have already cited, he includes verses from such texts as the *Chandogya Upanishad, Krishna Upanishad, Narada Purana, Kurma Purana, Garuda Purana, Devi Purana, Nrisimha Purana, Padma Purana, Brahma Purana, Agni Purana, Saura Purana, Matsya Purana, Vayu Purana, Markandeya Purana, Varaha Purana, Vamana Purana, Vishnu Purana, Skanda Purana, Upapuranas, Narayana-Samhita, Krishna-yamala, Brahma-yamala, Vishnu-yamala, Yoga-vasistha,* and the *Tantras,* such as *Urdhvamnaya-tantra, Kapila Tantra, Visvasara Tantra, Kularnava Tantra,* and others.

These and other predictions confirm the fact that Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu would appear to specifically propagate the chanting of the holy names. Furthermore, in the Fourth Chapter of the *Antya-lila* of the *Caitanya Bhagavata,* which is a biography of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu written by Sri Vrindavan dasa

Thakura who is said to be a later incarnation of Srila Vyasadeva, Lord Caitanya explains: "I have appeared on earth to propagate the congregational chanting of the holy names of God. In this way, I will deliver the sinful material world. Those demons who never before accepted My authority and lordship will weep in joy by chanting My names. I will vigorously distribute devotional service, *bhakti,* which is sought after even by demigods, sages, and perfected beings, so that even the most abominable sinners will receive it. But those who, intoxicated with education, wealth, family background, and knowledge, criticize and offend My devotees, will be deprived of everything and will never know My true identity." Then Sri Caitanya specifically states *(Antya-lila* 4.126): "I declare that My name will be preached in every town and village on this earth."

This verifies the fact that the chanting of the *maha-mantra* is the rare and special opportunity given by God for all to be relieved from the problems of the age of Kali and of material life in general. As confirmed in the *Caitanya-caritamrita* (Adi-lila, 3.77-78), it is Sri Krishna Caitanya who inaugurates the congregational chanting of the holy names, which is the most sublime of all spiritual sacrifices. Intelligent people will worship Him through this means, while other foolish people will continue in the cycle of repeated birth and death in this material world.

In another place of the *Caitanya-caritamrita* (Antya-lila, 20.8-9), Sri Caitanya specifically tells Svarupa Damodara and Ramananda Raya that chanting the holy names is the most practical way to attain salvation from material existence in this age, and anyone who is intelligent and takes up this process of worshiping Krishna will attain the direct shelter of Krishna.

He also strongly opposed the impersonalist philosophy of Shankaracharya and established the principle of *acintya-bhedabheda-tattva.* This specified that the Supreme and the individual soul are inconceivably and simultaneously one and different. This means that the Supreme and the *jiva* souls are the same in quality, being eternally spiritual, but always separate individually. The *jivas* are small and subject to being influenced by the material energy, while the Supreme is infinite and always above and beyond the material manifestation.

Sri Caitanya taught that the direct meaning of the Vedic *shastras* is that the living entities are to engage in devotional service, *bhakti,* to the Supreme,

Bhagavan Sri Krishna. Through this practice there can develop a level of communication between God and the individual by which God will lovingly reveal Himself to those who become qualified. In this understanding, the theistic philosophy of Vaishnavism reached its climax.

As previously explained, there is a system of self-realization especially recommended for each age. In the age of Kali, people are not attracted to spiritual pursuits and are often rebellious against anything that seems to restrict or stifle their freedom to do anything they want. Since in this age we are so easily distracted by so many things and our mind is always in a whirl, we need an easy path. Therefore, the Vedic *shastra* explains that God has given us an easy way to return to Him in this age. It is almost as if He has said, "Since you are My worst son, I give you the easiest process." The *Caitanya-caritamrita* (Adi-lila, 3.40) confirms this and says that the Supreme Being descends as Sri Caitanya, with a golden complexion, to simply spread the glories of chanting the holy names, which is the only religious principle in this age of Kali. In this way, God Himself has given the method of chanting His holy names as the most effective means to reach His spiritual abode.

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu did not become much involved in writing. In fact, He only wrote eight verses known as *Shikshastaka,* but His followers compiled extensive Sanskrit literature that documented His life and fully explained His teachings. Thus, other books are available that give a much more elaborate biography of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu.

APPENDIX TWO

The Significance of Deities and Deity Worship

Deities and images of the Supreme, His *avatars,* and the demigods have been shown many times in this volume, but what is the significance of deities and deity worship? One thing to understand is that all the images of the deities in the Vedic pantheon, as found in the temples, are made according to explicit details and instructions found in the Vedic texts. Then they are installed in the temple in an elaborate ceremony wherein the personalities are called to appear in the form of that deity. Some of the deities are demigods, while others, such as Krishna, Vishnu, Ramachandra, are of the Supreme Being.

Some people, however, do not believe that God has a form. But many verses in the *Puranas* and, particularly, the *Brahma-samhita* establish that the Supreme Being does have a specific form. These texts also describe His variegated features, which include His spiritual shape, characteristics, beauty, strength, intelligence, activities, *etc.* Therefore, it is considered that the authorized deities of the Supreme that are shaped according to these descriptions provide a view of the personal form of God.

Those who have no knowledge of God or His form will certainly consider the temple deities as idols. But this is the effect of their foolishness or lack of knowledge. They think that the deities are simply the products of someone's imagination. Of course, there are those who say that God has no form, spiritual or material, or that there is no Supreme Being. Others think that since God must be formless, they can imagine or worship any material form as God, or they regard any image as merely an external manifestation of the Supreme. But images of the demigods are not additional forms of an impersonal God, nor are

they equal to God. All such people who think in the above mentioned ways have resorted to their own imagination to reach such conclusions and are, therefore, idolaters. The imaginary images and opinions of God that are formed by those who have not properly learned about, seen, or realized God are indeed idols, and those who accept such images or opinions are certainly idolaters. This is because their images or opinions are based on ignorance and are not a likeness of His form.

Nonetheless, God is described in the Vedic literature, which explains that God is *sat-chit-ananda vigraha*, or the form of complete spiritual essence, full of eternity, knowledge, and bliss, and is not material in any way. His body, soul, form, qualities, names, pastimes, etc., are all nondifferent and are of the same spiritual quality. This form of God is not an idol designed from someone's imagination, but is the true form, even if He should descend into this material creation. And since the spiritual nature of God is absolute, He is nondifferent from His name. Thus, the name *Krishna* is an *avatara* or incarnation of Krishna in the form of sound. Similarly, His form in the temple is not merely a representation, but is also qualitatively the same as Krishna as the *archa-vigraha,* or the worshipable form as the deity. We simply have to raise or spiritualize our consciousness enough to perceive this.

Some people may question that if the deity is made from material elements, such as stone, marble, metal, wood, or paint, how can it be the spiritual form of God? The answer is given that since God is the source of all material and spiritual energies, material elements are also a form of God. Therefore, God can manifest as the deity in the temple, though made of stone or other elements, since He can transform what is spiritual into material energy, and material energy back into spiritual energy. Thus, the deity can easily be accepted as the Supreme since He can appear in any element as He chooses. In this way, even though we may be unqualified to see God, who is beyond the perceptibility of our material senses, the living beings in this material creation are allowed to see and approach the Supreme through His *archa-vigraha* form as the worshipable deity in the temple. This is considered His causeless mercy on the materially conditioned living beings.

In this manner, the Supreme Being gives Himself to His devotees so they can

become absorbed in serving, remembering and meditating on Him. Thus, the Supreme comes to dwell in the temple, and the temple becomes the spiritual abode on earth. In time, the body, mind and senses of the devotee become spiritualized by serving the deity, and the Supreme becomes fully manifest to him or her. Worshiping the deity of the Supreme and using one's senses in the process of bhakti-yoga, devotional service to the Supreme, provides a means for one's true essential spiritual nature to unfold. The devotee becomes spiritually realized and the deity reveals His spiritual nature to the sincere souls according to their evolutionary spiritual development. This can continue to the level in which the Supreme Being in the form of the deity engages in a personal relationship and performs reciprocal, loving pastimes with the devotee, as has previously taken place with other advanced individuals.

At this stage, what is called *darshan* is not simply a matter of viewing the deity in the temple, but to one who is spiritually realized it is a matter of experiencing the deity and entering into a personal, reciprocal exchange with the Supreme Personality in the form of the deity. At that stage, you may view the deity, but the deity also gazes at you, and then there is a spiritual exchange wherein the deity begins to reveal His personality to you. This is what separates those who are experienced from those who are not, or those who can delve into this spiritual exchange and those who may still be trying to figure it out. For those who have experienced such an exchange with the Supreme or His deity, at this stage the worship of the Supreme Being in the deity form moves up to a whole different level, with no limits as to the spiritual love that can be shared and experienced between the devotee and the deity.

APPENDIX THREE

Deity Worship From Thousands of Years Ago

When it comes to understanding the Vedic gods and goddesses, and to the topic of worshiping deities, some question that it was not really a Vedic custom, but was only a recent invention. Thus, they try to push the idea that it is not an authorized Vedic process.

However, if we look into this we can see that there certainly are various references in assorted Vedic texts that do recommend it. Furthermore, there are several famous temples in holy places of India where it is known that the deities were installed or established by Vajranabha, Lord Krishna's great-grandson as far back as nearly 3000 BCE. A few of these can be described as follows:

For example, in the land near Mathura, several kilometers farther south of Gokul is the Dauji temple. Dauji is the deity of Lord Balarama that was one such deity originally installed 5,000 years ago by King Vajranabha, Krishna's great-grandson. In fact, he established a number of other Krishna deities in the area. The present temple was built 200 years ago by Shyama Das of Delhi. Many people attend this temple to get *darshan* of the single deity of Lord Balarama that stands 6 feet tall. From the other side of the temple you can see the deity of Revati, Lord Balarama's wife. Nearby is the Balabhadra Kund or Kshira (milk) Sagara (sea) where the deity of Lord Balarama had been hidden during the Moghul invasion. Near this kund is a temple to Harideva and in the bazaar is another temple to Banke Bihari.

In Vrindavan is the Radha-Govindaji temple that is another of the seven major temples of Vrindavan. It is across the road and a little farther down the street

from the Rangaji temple. It was established by Rupa Gosvami where he discovered the Gopala deity. The beautiful temple is made out of red sandstone and was completed in 1590. The temple is now only two storeys tall but once reached up to seven storeys. The Muslim fanatic Aurangzeb, doing his dirty work once again, dismantled the upper five storeys of the temple due to his envy. While his men were destroying the temple, there was a loud thunderous noise that shook the ground. This put fear into the hearts of the men and they immediately stopped and ran away. Due to fear of the Moghuls, before they arrived the devotees moved the original deities to Jaipur where today many pilgrims go to see them. So, the Vrindavana temple now has *pratibhuh* deities, or representative expansions, of the original Radha-Govindaji that are worshiped. The original Govindaji deity is said to have been installed thousands of years ago by Vajranabha.

Also in Vrindavan, farther into the eastern part of town are many other temples; including the large and ornate Lala Babu Mandir with Radha, Krishna, and Lalita deities. Then at the corner where we turn off from Loi Bazaar to go toward the Banke Bihari Mandir, we find the Gopishwara Mahadeva Shiva temple with a Shiva *linga,* said to have been originally installed by Krishna's great-grandson, Vajranabha, and is the place where Lord Shiva did austerities in hopes of entering the *rasa-lila* dance as a *gopi* (cow-herd girl). In the morning devotees wash the *linga* with milk and other items, and then later the *pujaris* dress the *linga* in bright colored clothes.

A few miles from Barsana is Nandagram, another place where Krishna performed many childhood pastimes described in the *Bhagavatam*. On top of the hill is the main temple that has deities of Krishna, Balarama, Nanda Maharaja (Krishna's father), Mother Yashoda, Srimati Radharani, and two of Krishna's friends. There is also a Shiva *lingam* in a small shrine across from the temple called Nandisvara, said to have been installed by Vajranabha many hundreds of years ago. It is considered that this hill is an incarnation of Lord Shiva. From the top of the walls that surround the temple we can get good views of the area, and someone who is familiar with it can point out other nearby places connected with Krishna's pastimes that we may want to visit.

In the foothills of Girnar Hill is the Radha-Damodara temple with beautiful

deities of Krishna's four-armed form. As Lakshmi-Narayana, the deities are formed of the typical black and brown stone, and are described in the *Skanda Purana* as being self-manifested over 1 2,000 years ago. Next to the main temple is another for Lord Balarama and Revati, His consort. The original temple at this site is said to have been built 4500 years ago by Vajranath, Lord Krishna's great-grandson. Not far away is a place where lived Vallabha, the 16th century Vaishnava *acharya.*

Another interesting story is in regard to Guruvayoor in south India, which has the deity of a four-armed standing Vishnu with a chakra in the right hand, conchshell in the left, and mace and lotus flower in the other two. Sri Krishna showed this form of His only twice during His appearance on earth: once to Arjuna just before the battle of Kurukshetra while speaking the *Bhagavad-gita,* and once to His parents, Vasudeva and Devaki, at the time of His birth. This deity is said to have been worshiped by Lord Krishna Himself at Dwaraka thousands of years ago. The legend is that when Krishna left this world, He gave the deity to His devotee Uddhava to look after it. He then ordered Brihaspati, the guru or spiritual teacher of the demigods, and Vayu, demigod of the wind, to take care of this Vishnu deity and to install it somewhere for the benefit of humanity. When they arrived at Dwaraka to get the deity, the city of Dwaraka had already sunk into the sea. After searching in the water, they found the deity and went south. Not knowing where to go, they sat down by the side of a lake and began to meditate. Soon, Shiva appeared and after some discussion they decided to start a new temple for the deity of Vishnu near the Rudratirtha Lake. Since that time 5,000 years ago, the place has been known as Guruvayoor *(guru* for Brihaspati and *vayoor* for Vayu).

Other examples could be given of the stories and legends of deities that are found in various temples throughout India, or holy places where temples have been established thousands of years ago. (My book *Seeing Spiritual India* goes into many of these.) But there are additional references we can use as well.

For example, even in the *Puranas* there are stories that include the importance of worshiping deities. In the *Bhagavata Purana* (4th Canto, 8th Chapter) there is the popular story of the great sage Narada Muni teaching Dhruva Maharaja the best way to become spiritual realized and explains the form of the Lord upon

which to meditate and how to worship the deity of the Lord. The interesting thing here is that the *Bhagavata Purana* was composed by Srila Vyasadeva about 5,000 years ago, and the incident of Dhruva Maharaja is known to have taken place thousands of years before that. So, this gives some indication of how long deity worship has been going on. Also, in the 11th Canto, Chapter 27 of the *Bhagavata Purana,* Lord Krishna explains to Uddhava the details of deity worship, how it is important, the benefits of someone installing a deity in the temple, maintaining it, or the harm that comes to one for dishonoring the deity or the temples. So, this has been a serious aspect of the Vedic process for spiritual development for many thousands of years.

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GLOSSARY

Acharya--the spiritual master who sets the proper standard by his own example.

Acintya-bhedabheda-tattva--simultaneously one and different. The doctrine Lord Sri Caitanya taught referring to the Absolute as being both personal and impersonal.

Advaita--nondual, meaning that the Absolute is one with the infinitesimal souls with no individuality between them. The philosophy of Sankaracharya.

Agni--fire, or Agni the demigod of fire.

Agnihotra--the Vedic sacrifice in which offerings were made to the fire, such as ghee, milk, sesame seeds, grains, *etc.* The demigod Agni would deliver the offerings to the demigods that were referred to in the ritual.

Ahankara--false ego, identification with matter.

Ananda--spiritual bliss.

Ananta--unlimited.

Aranyaka--sacred writings that are supposed to frame the essence of the *Upanishads.*

Arati--the ceremony of worship when incense and ghee lamps are offered to the Deities.

Arca-vigraha--the worshipable Deity form of the Lord made of stone, wood, *etc.* Aryan-- a noble person, one who is on the path of spiritual advancement.

Asana--postures for meditation, or exercises for developing the body into a fit instrument for spiritual advancement.

Asat--that which is temporary.

Ashrama--one of the four orders of spiritual life, such as *brahmachari* (celibate student), *grihastha* (married householder), *vanaprastha* (retired stage), and *sannyasa* (renunciate); or the abode of a spiritual teacher or *sadhu.*

Asura--one who is ungodly or a demon.

Atma--the self or soul. Sometimes means the body, mind, and senses.

Atman--usually referred to as the Supreme Self.

Avatara--an incarnation of the Lord who descends from the spiritual world.

Avidya--ignorance or nescience.

Aum--om or *pranava*

Ayurveda--the original holistic form of medicine as described in the Vedic literature.

Bhajan--song of worship.

Bhakta--a devotee of the Lord who is engaged in *bhakti-yoga.*

Bhakti--love and devotion for God.

Bhakti-yoga--the path of offering pure devotional service to the Supreme.

Bhava--preliminary stage of love of God.

Brahma--the demigod of creation who was born from Lord Vishnu, the first created living being and the engineer of the secondary stage of creation of the universe when all the living entities were manifested.

Brahmachari--a celebate student who is trained by the spiritual master. One of the four divisions or ashramas of spiritual life.

Brahmajyoti--the great white light or effulgence which emanates from the body of the Lord.

Brahmaloka--the highest planet or plane of existence in the universe; the planet where Lord Brahma lives.

Brahman--the spiritual energy; the all-pervading impersonal aspect of the Lord; or the Supreme Lord Himself.

Brahmana or brahmin--one of the four orders of society; the intellectual class of men who have been trained in the knowledge of the *Vedas* and initiated by a spiritual master.

Brahmana--the supplemental books of the four primary *Vedas.* They usually contained instructions for performing Vedic *agnihotras,* chanting the *mantras,* the purpose of the rituals, *etc.* The *Aitareya* and *Kaushitaki Brahmanas* belong to the *Rig-veda,* the *Satapatha Brahmana* belongs to the *White Yajur-veda*, and the *Taittiriya Brahmana* belongs to the *Black Yajur-veda*. The *Praudha* and *Shadvinsa Brahmanas* are two of the eight *Brahmanas* belonging to the *Atharva-veda.*

Brahmastra--a nuclear weapon that is produced and controlled by *mantra* .

Caitanya-caritamrita--the scripture by Krishnadasa Kaviraja which explains the teachings and pastimes of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu.

Caitanya Mahaprabhu--the most recent incarnation of the Lord who appeared in the 15th century in Bengal and who originally started the *sankirtana* movement, based on congregational chanting of the holy names.

Causal Ocean or Karana Ocean--is the corner of the spiritual sky where Maha-Vishnu lies down to create the material manifestation.

Cit--eternal knowledge.

Chakra-- a wheel, disk, or psychic energy center situated along the spinal column in the subtle body of the physical shell.

Chhandas--sacred hymns of the *Atharva-veda.*

Darshan--the devotional act of seeing and being seen by the Deity in the temple.

Deity--the *arca-vigraha,* or worshipful form of the Supreme in the temple, or deity as the worshipful image of the demigod. A capital D is used in referring to Krishna or one of His expansions, while a small d is used when referring to a demigod or lesser personality.

Devas--demigods or heavenly beings from higher levels of material existence, or a godly person.

Devaloka--the higher planets or planes of existence of the devas.

Dham--a holy place.

Dharma--the essential nature or duty of the living being.

Dualism--as related in this book refers to the Supreme as both an impersonal force as well as a person.

Durga--the form of Parvati, Shiva's wife, as a warrior goddess known by many names according to her deeds, such as Simhavahini when riding her lion, Mahishasuramardini for killing the demon Mahishasura, Jagaddhatri as the mother of the universe, Kali when she killed the demon Raktavija, Tara when killing Shumba, *etc.*

Dvapara-yuga--the third age which lasts 864,000 years.

Dwaita--dualism, the principle that the Absolute Truth consists of the infinite Supreme Being and the infinitesimal individual souls.

Gandharvas--the celestial angel-like beings who have beautiful forms and voices, and are expert in dance and music, capable of becoming invisible and can help souls on the earthly plane.

Ganesh--a son of Shiva, said to destroy obstacles (as Vinayaka) and offer good luck to those who petition him.

Ganges--the sacred and spiritual river which, according to the *Vedas,* runs throughout the universe, a portion of which is seen in India. The reason the river is considered holy is that it is said to be a drop of the Karana Ocean that leaked in when Lord Vishnu, in His incarnation as Vamanadeva, kicked a small hole in the universal shell with His toe. Thus, the water is spiritual as well as being purified by the touch of Lord Vishnu.

Gangapuja--the arati ceremony for worshiping the Ganges.

Gangotri--the source of the Ganges River in the Himalayas.

Garbhodakasayi Vishnu--the expansion of Lord Vishnu who enters into each universe.

Gaudiya--a part of India sometimes called Aryavarta or land of the Aryans, located south of the Himalayas and north of the Vindhya Hills.

Gayatri--the spiritual vibration or *mantra* from which the other *Vedas* were expanded and which is chanted by those who are initiated as *brahmanas* and given the spiritual understanding of Vedic philosophy.

Goloka Vrindavana--the name of Lord Krishna's spiritual planet.

Gosvami--one who is master of the senses.

Govinda-- a name of Krishna which means one who gives pleasure to the cows and senses.

Gunas--the modes of material nature of which there is *sattva* (goodness), rajas(passion), and *tamas* (ignorance).

Guru -- a spiritual master.

Hare--the Lord's pleasure potency, Radharani, who is approached for accessibility to the Lord.

Hari--a name of Krishna as the one who takes away one's obstacles on the spiritual path.

Haribol--a word that means to chant the name of the Lord, Hari.

Harinam--refers to the name of the Lord, Hari.

Hiranyagarbha--another name of Brahma who was born of Vishnu in the primordial waters within the egg of the universe.

Hrishikesa-- a name for Krishna which means the master of the senses.

Impersonalism--the view that God has no personality or form, but is only an impersonal force.

Impersonalist--those who believe God has no personality or form.

Incarnation--the taking on of a body or form.

Indra--the King of heaven and controller of rain, who by his great power conquers the forces of darkness.

Jiva--the individual soul or living being.

Jivanmukta--a liberated soul, though still in the material body and universe.

Jiva-shakti--the living force.

Jnana-kanda--the portion of the *Vedas* which stresses empirical speculation for understanding truth.

Jnana-yoga--the process of linking with the Supreme through empirical knowledge and mental speculation.

Kala--eternal time.

Kali--the demigoddess who is the fierce form of the wife of Lord Shiva. The word *kali* comes from *kala,* the Sanskrit word for time: the power that dissolves or destroys everything.

Kali-yuga--the fourth and present age, the age of quarrel and confusion, which lasts 432,000 years and began 5,000 years ago.

Kalpa--a day in the life of Lord Brahma which lasts a thousand cycles of the four *yugas.*

Kapila--an incarnation of Lord Krishna who propagated the Sankhya philosophy.

Karanodakasayi Vishnu (Maha-Vishnu)--the expansion of Lord Krishna who created all the material universes.

Karma--material actions performed in regard to developing one's position or for future results which produce *karmic* reactions. It is also the reactions one endures from such fruitive activities.

Karma-kanda--the portion of the *Vedas* which primarily deals with recommended fruitive activities for various results.

Karma-yoga--the system of yoga for dovetailing one's activities for spiritual advancement.

Kirtana--chanting or singing the glories of the Lord.

Krishna--the name of the original Supreme Personality of Godhead which means the most attractive and greatest pleasure. He is the source of all other incarnations, such as Vishnu, Rama, Narasimha, Narayana, Buddha, Parashurama, Vamanadeva, Kalki at the end of Kali-yuga, *etc.*

Krishnaloka--the spiritual planet where Lord Krishna resides.

Kshatriya--the second class of *varna* of society, or occupation of administrative or protective service, such as warrior or military personel.

Ksirodakasayi Vishnu--the Supersoul expansion of the Lord who enters into each atom and the heart of each individual.

Kumbha Mela--the holy festival in which millions of pilgrims and sages gather to bathe in the holy and purifying rivers for liberation at particular auspicious times that are calculated astrologically. The Kumbha Mela festivals take place every three years alternating between Allahabad, Ujjain, Nasik, and Haridwar.

Kuruksetra--the place of battle 5,000 years ago between the Pandavas and the Kauravas ninety miles north of New Delhi, where Krishna spoke the *Bhagavad-gita.*

Lakshmi--the goddess of fortune and wife of Lord Vishnu.

Lila--pastimes.

Lilavataras--the many incarnations of God who appear to display various spiritual pastimes to attract the conditioned souls in the material world.

Linga--the shapeless form of Lord Shiva.

Mahabharata--the great epic of the Pandavas, which includes the *Bhagavad-gita,* by Vyasadeva.

Maha-mantra--the best mantra for self-realization in this age, called the Hare Krishna mantra.

Mahat-tattva--the total material energy.

Maha-Vishnu or Karanodakasayi Vishnu--the Vishnu expansion of Lord Krishna from whom all the material universes emanate.

Mandir--a temple.

Mantra-- a sound vibration which prepares the mind for spiritual realization and delivers the mind from material inclinations. In some cases a mantra is chanted for specific material benefits.

Manu--the demigod sons of Brahma. Manu is the forefather and lawgiver of the human race. A succession of 14 Manus exist during each day of Brahma, called the manvantaras.

Manvantara--the series of incarnations of Manus.

Maya--illusion, or anything that appears to not be connected with the eternal Absolute Truth.

Mayavadi--the impersonalist or voidist who believes that the Supreme has no form.

Mitra--the deity controlling the sun, and who gives life to earth.

Moksha--liberation from material existence.

Murti--a Deity of the Lord or spiritual master that is worshiped.

Murugan--means the divine child, the Tamil name for Subramaniya, one of the sons of Shiva and Parvati, especially worshiped in South India.

Narayana--the four-handed form of the Supreme Lord.

Om or *Omkara--pranava*, the transcendental *om mantra,* generally referring to the attributeless or impersonal aspects of the Absolute.

Paramahamsa--the highest level of self-realized devotees of the Lord.

Paramatma--the Supersoul, or localized expansion of the Lord.

Parampara--the system of disciplic succession through which transcendental knowledge descends.

Parvati--Lord Shiva's spouse, daughter of Parvata. Parvata is the personification of the Himalayas. She is also called Gauri for her golden complexion, Candi, Bhairavi (as the wife of Bhairava, Shiva), Durga, Ambika, and Shakti.

Patanjali--the authority on the *astanga-yoga* system.

Pradhana--the total material energy in its unmanifest state.

Prajapati--deity presiding over procreation.

Prakriti--matter in its primordial state, the material nature.

Prana--the life air or cosmic energy.

Pranayama--control of the breathing process as in astanga or raja-yoga.

Pranava--same as *omkara.*

Prasada--food or other articles that have been offered to the Deity in the temple

and then distributed amongst people as the blessings or mercy of the Deity. Prema--matured love for Krishna.

Puja--the worship offered to the Deity.

Pujari--the priest who performs worship, *puja*, to the Deity. *Purusha* or *Purusham*--the supreme enjoyer. Raja-yoga--the eightfold yoga system.

Rajo-guna--the material mode of passion.

Ramachandra--an incarnation of Krishna as He appeared as the greatest of kings.

Ramayana--the great epic of the incarnation of Lord Ramachandra.

Rasa--an enjoyable taste or feeling, a relationship with God.

Shabda-brahma--the original spiritual vibration or energy of which the *Vedas* are composed.

Sac-cid-ananda-vigraha--the transcendental form of the Lord or of the living entity which is eternal, full of knowledge and bliss.

Sadhana--a specific practice or discipline for attaining God realization.

Sadhu--Indian holy man or devotee.

Saguna Brahman--the aspect of the Absolute with form and qualities.

Samadhi--trance, the perfection of being absorbed in the Absolute.

Samsara--rounds of life; cycles of birth and death; reincarnation.

Sanatana-dharma--the eternal nature of the living being, to love and render service to the supreme lovable object, the Lord.

Sankirtana-yajna--the prescribed sacrifice for this age: congregational chanting of the holy names of God.

Sannyasa--the renounced order of life, the highest of the four *ashramas* on the spiritual path.

Sarasvati--the goddess of knowledge and intelligence.

Sattva-guna--the material mode of goodness.

Satya-yuga--the first of the four ages which lasts 1,728,000 years.

Shaivites--worshipers of Lord Shiva.

Shakti--energy, potency or power, the active principle in creation. Also the active power or wife of a deity, such as Shiva/Shakti.

Shastra--the authentic revealed scripture.

Shiva--the benevolent one, the demigod who is in charge of the material mode of ignorance and the destruction of the universe. Part of the triad of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva who continually create, maintain, and destroy the universe. He is known as Rudra when displaying his destructive aspect.

Smriti--the traditional Vedic knowledge "that is remembered" from what was directly heard by or revealed to the *rishis.*

Sravanam--hearing about the Lord.

Srimad-Bhagavatam--the most ripened fruit of the tree of Vedic knowledge compiled by Vyasadeva.

Sruti--scriptures that were received directly from God and transmitted orally by brahmanas or *rishis* down through succeeding generations. Traditionally, it is considered the four primary *Vedas.*

Sudra--the working class of society, the fourth of the *varnas.*

Svami--one who can control his mind and senses.

Tamo-guna--the material mode of ignorance.

Tapasya--voluntary austerity for spiritual advancement.

Tilok--the clay markings that signify a person's body as a temple, and the sect or school of thought of the person.

Tirtha-- a holy place of pilgrimage.

Upanishads--the portions of the *Vedas* which primarily explain philosophically the Absolute Truth. It is knowledge of Brahman which releases one from the world and allows one to attain self-realization when received from a qualified teacher. Except for the *Isa Upanishad,* which is the 40th chapter of the *Vajasaneyi Samhita* of the *Sukla (White*) *Yajur-veda,* the *Upanishads* are connected to the four primary *Vedas,* generally found in the *Brahmanas.*

Vaikunthas--the planets located in the spiritual sky.

Vaishnava--a worshiper of the Supreme Lord Vishnu or Krishna and His expansions or incarnations.

Vedanta-sutras--the philosophical conclusion of the four *Vedas.*

Vedas--generally means the four primary *samhitas;* the *Rig, Yajur, Sama,* and *Atharva.*

Virajanadi or Viraja River--the space that separates the material creation from the spiritual sky.

Vishnu--the expansion of Lord Krishna who enters into the material energy to create and maintain the cosmic world.

Vrindavana--the place where Lord Krishna displayed His village pastimes 5,000 years ago, and is considered to be part of the spiritual abode.

Vyasadeva--the incarnation of God who appeared as the greatest philosopher who compiled all the *Vedas* into written form.

Yajna--a ritual or austerity that is done as a sacrifice for spiritual merit, or ritual worship of a demigod for good *karmic* reactions.

Yamaraja--the demigod and lord of death who directs the living entities to various punishments according to their activities.

Yantra--a machine, instrument, or mystical diagram used in ritual worship.

Yuga-avataras--the incarnations of God who appear in each of the four *yugas* to explain the authorized system of self-realization in that age.